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**MASTER'S THESIS**

**POLITICAL AND SOCIAL  
IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGES IN  
ROCK MUSIC IN PRAGUE SINCE  
THE LATE 1960'S**

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## **Table of Contents**

Introduction	4
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### **I. The 1960's and 1970's with Emphasis on the Czech Underground**

Allen Ginsberg's Importance on Prague Underground Culture	7
Jan Schneider explains the indirect effect of the underground	10
A time of the Third Czech Musical Revival	18
The Plastic People of the Universe, Prague 1968 – 1989	21
Interview with Vrat'a Brabenec	22
Egon Bondy: philosopher, agent, lyricist and political analyst	30
An Outsider's Thought's as Analysis	33
An Interview with Prague-based Music Ethnologist Darrell Jonsson	34
An Interview with Czech Television Music Series Director	
Vaclav Křístek and Czech Music Historian Radek Diestler	39

### **II. The 1980's and 1990's**

The 1980's as a Marker of the Musical Thaw	45
An Interview with Mirek Wanek of Už Jsme Doma	45
The John Lennon Wall	50

### **Table of Contents (Continued)**

The 1990's as a Time of Change Leading up to the Present Situation of Music	56
Interview with 1990's Icon Monika Načeva and Analysis	56
An Interview with Ed Zawadzki from Ivan Král's Group	63

### **III. After 2000**

An Interview with Current Prague Musician Justin Lavash	69
An Interview with Time Out and Variety Magazine's Will Tizard	70
Social Implication of the Shift in Music	72
An Interview with Radio Free Europe's Ron Synovitz	74
Recent Mainstream Music in the Czech Republic	77
Analysis of Recent Mainstream Trend	85
Conclusion	88
Bibliography	90

## **Introduction**

Music has played an important role in the political and social developments in former Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic over the past 40 years. The underground movement that was born during the 1960's and 1970's and its younger cousin the alternativa movement have had a substantial impact on the perception of Czech society and its political scene as well as influenced several generations of listeners. It is often considered to have heavily contributed to the events leading up to the Velvet Revolution. In the 1980's, it drew criticism from the state for facets such as language. The 1990's brought a vast amount of international music and commercialization, though it is important to note underground trading of international music was very strong even before the Velvet Revolution. Czech music may have shifted toward an apolitical role, but the power of musical movements have been proven by the lessons of the past. The political role may have been inadvertent, but not inert. Its role is to be taken into consideration in the events that took place during up until 1989. The purpose of this paper is to attempt to better understand the role of music in Czech society, specifically the underground movement, in its effect on society and politics.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the evolution of independent music in the Czech Republic from the late 1960's until the present with regard to its political and social context. I have conducted a series of interviews with musicians, music historians, journalists, and a Czech Television director of a series on music in the Czech Republic. These interviews were conducted after gathering reference material available in a variety of formats. The goal of the interviews was to gather a body of

information from primary sources and attempt to obtain information not currently readily available. I have also interviewed some jazz and blues experts, but finally decided to focus on the impact of the underground--especially live rock music. Though the scope of over 40 years is a massive undertaking, I have attempted to create a linear understanding of the forms in which music played a role in politics during communism as well as its transformation into its present day form. I chose to base most information on primary sources (or interviews) and contacted those who were available to me. Music ethnologist Darrell Jonsson offers insight as to the true origins of Czech music. I was able to speak with pivotal musicians such as Vratislav Brabanec of the Plastic People of the Universe, Mirek Wanek from Už Jsme Doma, and Monika Načeva. I was also able to speak with musicians such as Justin Lavash and Ed Zawadzki to get a perspective on late 1990's and current live music and the culture that surrounds it. I believe this to be valuable, as these interviews add a modern perspective to the current stream of contemporary music and related issues. Moreover, it contrasts the impetus of the I was also able to speak with Radio Free Europe's Ron Synovitz to get his perspective on the latter half of the 1990's as well as Variety and Time Out Magazine editor and music reviewer Will Tizard as a testament to the changes over the last ten years.

One main goal of the paper is to prove a series of changes in Czech music over the last 50 years and explore the musical culture of each era. I have tried to be conscious of the fact that I am neither Czech, nor was I alive when the span of this study begins. Upon mentioning this to Václav Křístek, director of the successful Bigbít music series on Czech Television, he encouraged me to embrace analyzing the situation through the eyes of a foreigner, not only because it is all that I have available, but also because

it is a different perspective than what he would have. I am fortunate to have been able to hold interviews with so many primary sources for this research, but must say there are a multitude of others worthy of consultation. The multi-genre and multi-decade facet paired with the availability and willingness of interviewees to lend their time were factors, but on the whole those with whom I was able to conduct interviews contributed valuable knowledge about the political climate, social atmosphere and the musical aspect of the times. I believe much of this information to be unavailable elsewhere, as I tailored the questions to avoid information commonly available. Naturally, some basic information such as biographical backgrounds is not unique to this paper, but has been included when necessary to explain the context of the information gathered.

Czechs are a music-loving nation. The roles that music played during the time of communism and continuing into the present are intensely interesting and uniquely Czech. This topic was chosen in order to garner more information on one important aspect that helped shape the nation and culture I have had the opportunity to live in. This paper looks at social and political implications of the genre of rock music in the Czech Republic from the 1960's through the present.

## **The importance of Allen Ginsberg on underground culture in Prague in the 1960's.**

*And though I am the King of May, the Marxists have beat me upon the street, kept me up all night in Police Station, followed me thru Springtime Prague, detained me in secret and deported me from our kingdom by airplane.*

Král Majáles (I am the King of May)

Allen Ginsberg May 7, 1965

Though Allen Ginsberg was not a musician, his influence of his visit and deportation on the rock culture in Prague in the mid-1960's cannot be overlooked. He did write songs, but Ginsberg's main focus was writing. Many of his is works, such as "America" and "Witchita Vortex Sutra," earned him the title of political commentator. He was one of the founding members of the American Beat Generation, which would take hold in Czechoslovakia and influenced the title "Bigbít," which referred to more to rock 'n roll than poetry and literature. "Howl" highlights Ginsberg's focus on the First Amendment of the US Constitution, which states "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances" (First Amendment). Under communism, free exercise of religion and freedom of speech and press were not possible. Many youth in the East longed for these freedoms and Ginsberg's visit to Prague in 1965 only inflamed their interest in a life outside the Iron Curtain. Ginsberg's popularity were

not limited to the US or Czechoslovakia. He “became a figurehead of the global youth movement in the late 1960’s” (allenginsberg.org).

It was not the nature of Ginsberg’s deviances, such as homosexuality and excessive drug and alcohol abuse, that allowed his visit to Czechoslovakia, his writing and finally his finally being forced to board a plane to London which caused him to ascend to a somewhat iconic status in Czech underground lore of the era. It was the fact that *he was deviant*. Here was a figure who thought outside the box in the most free of countries and who thereby gained respected status both within and outside of the United States. This alternative way of living and the fame that surrounded it is the reason youth everywhere embraced the image of this American misfit. Eager to push the envelope and claim their own place in the world, “hippy types” congregated around this idea of living a life brimming with a sense of unbound abandon. This seems to have been particularly attractive to students in Czechoslovakia as well as to the individualistic ideology of those who would later be called the Czech underground movement. Specific poems aside, Ginsberg represented a sense of freedom some young Czechs longed for.

The importance of Ginsberg’s coronation as “King of May” lies in the relevance of the day itself. May Day has traditionally been a celebration of the leftist labor unions marked by political speeches. Though it originally began as an international protest for eight-hour workdays, it evolved to showcase the power of the working class (Flett). After a state enforced break in the celebration, May Day festivities resumed in 1965 (Česká televize).



After being kicked out of Cuba, Ginsberg traveled to Prague and then on to Russia. On April 30, 1965 Ginsberg arrived once again in Prague. One day later, he was crowned “King of May” on May Day at Výstaviště in Prague. "I walked in the May Day parade that morning," Ginsberg recalled, "and that afternoon some students asked me to be their king. I agreed; they put me on a truck, and I traveled in the procession of the Polytechnic School, with a Dixieland band on a nearby truck. The procession went through the city to a main square, where 10,000 to 15,000 people had gathered. I made a speech, dedicating the glory of my crown to Franz Kafka, who once lived on that square” (Kostelanetz)<sup>1</sup>. He spent the next few days with students in Prague. Ginsberg recounted, “I spent a lot of time with rock 'n' roll musicians. There it's called the 'big beat,' and the Czechs take this music with the same fervor as Liverpool” (Kostelanetz).

Ginsberg allegedly lost a notebook of writings, which was found by the father of one of his student friends. The notebook was dutifully handed over to the authorities that eventually expelled him from Czechoslovakia, citing homosexuality, alcoholism and corrupting the local youth (Kostelanetz). He wrote, “I am the King of May” on a flight to London.

**Voice of Intelligent Dissent –speaking with Jan Schneider, journalist, analyst, and scholar about the indirect effect of the underground on Czechoslovak politics.**

*People liked it (the underground) because it expressed opposition to the regime and hidden emotion. They couldn't afford it themselves, but they were pleased that someone else expressed their emotion. –Jan Schneider*

I spoke with Jan Schneider on several occasions to try to gain a better understanding of the atmosphere surrounding the underground movement. The interviews took place in the Lucerna complex in Prague as well as at Mr. Schneider's residence in Havlíčkův Brod in March of 2011. Mr. Schneider is a signator of Charter 77 and holds a Certificate in Religious Studies from Cambridge. He is extremely knowledgeable about the Czech political situation, as he has worked for Czech government services as well as the Czech intelligence service. As a security analyst and journalist for Czech Position online newspaper, Mr. Schneider has a vast grasp of internal and international events and applies his analytical skills and independent point of view to his journalism and consulting career. Additionally, Mr. Schneider is well-versed in a wide variety of genres of music. I will note that I met with him in his family's library on one occasion and was absolutely astounded by the catalogues of both music and literature on a wealth of subjects. Dr. Miloš Calda, a contemporary from Schneider's Cambridge studies days, recommended I speak with Mr. Schneider because of his depth of knowledge as well as his unique position in the Czech underground. Mr. Schneider is a leading voice for Czech dissidence.

The overarching theme of my interviews with Jan Schneider focused on the *indirect* influence the underground had on the establishment. Naturally, this proves much

more difficult to document than were it a myriad of concrete and direct influences. Schneider emphasizes the underground movement that developed did not set out to change the political structure or climate of Czechoslovakia. Simply put, it was a loosely-knit section of society that merely wished to live their lives in a manner free from external impediments. A sense of irony surrounds the underground movement because its existence remains strong and much discussed today *because of the impetus to extinguish it in its infancy*. Additionally, this impetus would eventually congeal the fragments of underground society to what could be considered a more united front. Schneider explains that these were people who did not set out to incite political change, but were *inadvertently forced* into a societal position that would eventually indirectly influence the very establishment that chose to persecute them.

Mr. Schneider lived in Prague during the week and spent the weeks with his family in Havlíčkův Brod. It was only after 1989 he gained the knowledge that the police were unaware of where he lived—what he describes as a damp cellar. He believes he ducked the radar because his presence did not merit much attention: on the weekend he was a dutiful family man and during the week he was a villager in the capital earning money on the railroad.

But Jan Schneider was more than a villager living in a Prague cellar. He played a vital role in the samizdat culture and was the primary transcriber of the works of Egon Bondy for about a decade, owing to his diligence to detail. (Bondy's role in the underground movement is described in greater detail further on in this paper.) For example, after Bondy's works were transcribed three or four times, the text might

happen to change. Think of the game ‘telephone’ where one person whispers a sentence in the ear of his neighbor until it comes full circle and it is revealed the original sentence has mutated beyond recognition. Schneider’s assiduous nature lead him to consult Bondy himself as to the accuracy of texts. This earned him the role of first reader of Bondy’s works for samizdat texts. Schneider notes that Bondy’s role was not particularly incendiary, as the police considered him a “jester” of sorts. It is known, as Schneider recounts, that Bondy spoke frequently with the police. Mr. Schneider maintains that Bondy was somehow able to avoid revealing the names the police were phishing while allowing them to believe the information he leaked was valuable and reliable. Perhaps not a jester at all...

The samizdat activity was not limited to Bondy’s works in the least. Schneider was prolific in his efforts and success to replicate a variety of forbidden literature. For example, he set about the task of making 15 copies of Chinese history. Each copy weighed in at 400 pages, resulting in a total of 6000 samizdat pages piled in Schneider’s subterranean flat. At this point, I must step outside this paper and express awe at the mental image of this. The amount of time and space an endeavor of this magnitude occupies is out of the scope of my life experience. I am therefore drawn to the conclusion that projects of this intensity, especially in light of its illegality, must stem from an immense conviction. Schneider relates that not all of the documents and literature were political: “It wasn’t strictly against the regime,” he remarks, “There were very good professional works concerning history of philosophy. What is dangerous about that?” And yet the danger that did surround samizdat is exactly that which makes it most impressive and laudable. I asked Mr. Schneider about this. Admittedly a naïve question, but one that I considered worth asking: Wasn’t there an element of fear of caught producing so much samizdat literature in one’s own flat?

Mr. Schneider knew the risks of his samizdat activities, and thus curbed the other activities frowned upon by the police at the time during periods when he had amassed large amounts of literature (such as the 6000 pages of Chinese history above). Mr. Schneider greatly enjoyed seminar evenings in contemporaries' homes. Two or three evenings a week, he would attend an informal, informative lecture that would be combined with chess and fellowship. It was at these lectures Schneider learned Hebrew and was introduced to a variety of other subjects such as Jewish thinking and the Old Testament. They evenings would last into the night, and Mr. Schneider says that they would sometimes go to work in the morning on just four hours of sleep. "You have to realize what is worth your time," recalls Schneider, "You are always learning something. We were tired after the day spent at work. I was working on the railroad. In winter it was very cold. In the evening we came to some flat and it was very hot and very nice. It was almost impossible to concentrate. But it was so interesting for us. We were able to speak very openly. These men were discussing. It was very, very nice. I think people who spent that time in universities didn't have such good professors as we did. It was a happy ghetto." He abstained from these fulfilling evenings during times when he was aware that that the sheer amount of samizdat literature in his Prague flat would land him in serious trouble were the police to find it. During these times, attending the private lectures was too risky.

As someone who has not experienced such things, I must comment that I find Mr. Schneider and his contemporaries who dared to publish samizdat literature in their homes and took risks like attending educational late night lectures in private homes

harrowing and something to be greatly respected. Additionally, his comment “It was a happy ghetto” illuminates the perservering positive power of this branch of the underground movement. Though samizdat and secret lectures may not be directly linked to the underground music movement of the time, some of the characteristics are certainly the same: non-conforming and individual at any cost. Some people were encouraged to reject some facets of communism by sheer inspiration of knowledge that others were, in one way or another, doing the same. Mr. Schneider notes that this is one reason many people felt drawn to the Plastic People of the Universe: “People liked it because it expressed opposition to the regime and hidden emotion. They couldn’t afford it themselves, but they were pleased that someone else expressed their emotion.” He also notes that recordings were often copied so many times, the lyrics were unintelligible! Above I have stated that I believe a leading factor in the popularity of Allen Ginsberg was not the specifics of his deviant behavior, but the bold fact that he was deviant and continued to be deviant even when punished. I will draw a parallel in the deviance, the non-conformism, or the alternative thinking of the brave samizdat chroniclers, those who attended forbidden educational seminars, and those who created music shunned by a regime to the idea surrounding the poet who was elected the King of May. *It mattered much less what was being copied, which subjects were being tackled, and which lyrics were being sung than the spirit of freedom that surrounded each of these actions.*

And this sentiment made the Czechoslovak government uneasy. Though the intensity of its persecution would ebb and flow, the culminating results were unintended. In a logical way, the regime wished to punish non-conformists so that they would conform. Singling out individuals or subgroups for punishment proved difficult with

the underground because they were not a concrete association, nor had they had distinct direct impacts on the state of politics—a nebulous target against which charges would often have to be fabricated. Mr. Schneider explained, “the regime was undermined without a direct struggle. You develop your own way of life and it is very difficult to fight with such kind of people (for a regime) because they cannot call them political subversions. People only lived according to their conscious. “ Thus, it proved difficult to punish these underground types. A group of individuals living according to their own thoughts does not constitute a political faction or even an association of any kind. Because music, like that of the Plastic People of the Universe, was a clear inspiration to those who entertained their own non-conformist ideas, music became a target. Schneider chuckled, explaining that the band was accused of using dirty words –thereby disturbing the peace. “But the frequency of dirty words in Schwejk is about the same as PPU lyrics,” he exclaims, “and that was required literature!”

1976 saw the arrest of many from the underground. Naturally, this was designed to quash the movement, if you could even call it a movement. But the circumstances at this point were not the same as they had been in the 1950s or other eras of increased government discipline. Schneider applies his knack for analysis to this phenomenon. For many lawyers and professionals, normalization meant the threat of an end or an actual end to their careers. Many people were listening to the music, and many were either uninterested or too intimidated to step outside the box, but most importantly; a group of persecuted lawyers stepped up to bat for this nebulous underground movement. “Their thinking was very different from the musicians,” said Schneider, “It wasn’t a political movement. They were very brave.” The lawyers had a lot to

loose not only in their professional lives, but in their political lives as well. And this is where Schneider delineates the irony of the situation –the persecution the regime instigated with the intention of eradicating subversive thought and culture in fact brought two sections of society together in a way that would not have happened were it not for their pressure. I would use the metaphor of a diamond for this situation – were it not for intense pressure, the molecules would not garner such strength or last so long.

Mr. Schneider paints an intriguing of the scene of the foyer of the Plastic People of the Universe’s trial of 1976. He describes it as a motley group of people who had come together to learn the musicians’ outcome. Free thinking musicians, professionals, and scholars like Schneider waited in the foyer for František Kriegl to emerge and report the proceedings inside the courtroom. (Ukrainian born Kriegl was one of only four people to vote against occupation in 1968. He worked as a pharmacist and held a three year position as pharmacy consultant to Cuba. He had been in an internment camp in France in the 30’s and, according to Mr. Schneider, František Kriegl had a keen interest in the girls of the underground...) (totalita.cz) “The secret police were listening and were unhappy because young people were getting together with Kriegl and it was due to the pressure of the communists. *They hadn’t met together before,*” said Schneider.

Of the 19 arrested, 15 were released. Aside from the fact that the four who were not released had studied in high school, there did not seem to be any rhyme or reason for the verdicts. Ostensibly, it was meant to serve as a warning for educated folks to steer clear of the way of the underground, lest they forfeit their years of hard-earned



education. But the results were not exactly as the regime intended. This round of persecution *strengthened* this motley, nebulous group and *attracted* some educated members of society. For example, Brabenec had not composed lyrics up until this point. After his arrest and conviction, inspiration for the Passion Play was ignited –a presentation which would represent the unruliness, the uncontrollability of this surly, untamable, and diverse section of society. Schneider noted that police threats to Brabanec such as the suggestion that he may “fall down” and break out the teeth needed to play his instrument while in jail only strengthened his resentment and determination. The persecution attracted student attention as well. At the time when Schneider signed Charter 77, Hlavsa’s girlfriend brought round the document, Schneider signed and thought nothing more of it. “I didn’t’ think much about it,” he said, “Two weeks later, the regime was hysterical.” And a number of students expressed the desire to sign the document. Schneider recounts that many of them were wisely dissuaded owing to the fact that the movement would later need educated members and a large number of students who had signed the Charter had already been thrown out of school. This differs from Brabenec’s story that history now tells that many students wanted to sign, but the reality was they were too afraid to. As with any history, it is common that people retell their own history to place them in a favorable light. Though I was not there, I would assume from the account of Mr. Schneider (that students were asked to either not sign or sign secretly) and the account of ---- (that many students were too nervous about their own futures to sign and later claimed that they had been in support of the movement), both are likely true. Interestingly, Mejla Hlavsa tried on multiple occasions to sign the document, but Schneider’s group would erase the signature each time, knowing Hlavsa was sure to be jailed. He had been arrested so many times, his signature on Charter 77 would be

the straw that broke the camel's back and would land the leader of the Plastic People of the Universe behind bars.

Jan Schneider was a close friend to all of the members of the Plastic People of the Universe. He recalls meeting Mejla while waiting for a bus to visit Vrat'a Brabanec. He saw a young, thin man at the bus stop and could tell by his looks that he was probably going out to see Brabanec. He asked Mejla if this were the case, and it was. They spent the ride getting to know one another. Later, Schneider would have a temporary stint on percussion with the band.

**The 1970's—a time of the Third Czech Musical Revival and the growth of the Plastic People of the Universe and the underground movement surrounding it.**

In 1975, an essay titled “A Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival” Ivan Martin Jirous was distributed in samizdat<sup>1</sup> form and circulated from person to person. Jirous, among other things, became the artistic leader and manager of The Plastic People of the Universe in 1969. He influenced the band to include visual aspects to their shows. In 2009, he released a book chronicling the experience of the Plastic People of the

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<sup>1</sup> According to Jiří Gruntorád , director of Libri Prohibiti, a unique association dedicated to the collection, maintenance and cataloging of forbidden literature under communism, Samizdat was virtually the underground press. The process of hand typing copies of literature, which would produce about 10 carbon copies, was not only extremely time-consuming, but subject to heavy punishment as well. Gruntorád himself was imprisoned four years for involvement in samizdat literature. [http://libpro.cts.cuni.cz/EN/law\\_en.htm](http://libpro.cts.cuni.cz/EN/law_en.htm)

Universe. He prefers the nickname “Magor,” a name which has the connotation of being unruly and conjures up the image of a wily character, and has published books such as *Magor’s Box*, *Magor’s Birds*, all the way up to *Magor’s Letters*. He is well known in the Czech Republic for his role with the band as well as his poetry and, lyrics, and other literature endeavors. His “Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival” was widely read by Czechs and Slovaks in the 1970’s and 1980’s and “became a kind of manifesto, or credo, for independent Czech culture.” (Jirous, pg. 56). Below he recounts the experience of trekking to a concert in 1974 in Líšnice, just outside of Prague one day before New Year’s Eve:

“We disembarked at the nearest train station and walked the remaining four kilometers. It was shortly before dusk, and we chose the shortest route across a stretch of half-frozen marshland to the village. There were forty-five of us. We knew that some of our other friends were arriving in Líšnice from another direction by bus and many more were expected to come in their own cars. We were all in a joyfully expectant mood. The year was at a close, and there was a palpable prospect of celebrating its end with music. We were going to hear the first concert performance of the groups *Umělá Hmota* (Synthetic Matter), *DG307*, and others. As we trudged through the desolate countryside, many of us experienced a feeling of profound anticipation, difficult to put into words. Our walk reminded us of the trek of the first Hussites up into the mountains. We picked up this theme, made some jokes on the subject, and speculated on its portent in our situation. Was it conceivable that upon arriving in Líšnice, the minions of the village overlord—now the hirelings of today’s establishment—would be waiting to disperse us?

That was indeed what happened. Never mind that this was planned as a New Year's party of friends – in this case some musicians and members of the village fire-brigade band –who had been playing soccer together and who were to meet in the hall of a public restaurant. Never mind the fact that the local council had given its tentative approval for such a meeting. All of us who had assembled in the hall were asked to disperse immediately or else force would be used to break up the gathering. We dispersed. Why? Because people who decide to go out of their way to hear music they like are similar to the people who in the past trekked up into the mountains to hear a good sermon, except that in our day we have no other choice but to give in to violence. Incidentally, when our crowd was being forced to clear the hall of the restaurant, another party was in progress in the bar of the same establishment, consisting of a group of hunters who were being entertained by a brass band whose decibel level was at least as powerful as that of a regular rock band. A candlelit Christmas tree completed the scene as a symbol of that gentle season. A member of that party had been instrumental in banning our kind of music, and he refused, in a rude manner, to discuss the matter with our representative. Instead, he called the police. He turned out to be the deputy to the secretary of the local Communist village council of Líšnice.

In the (Hussite) past, he would probably have been called a servant of the Anti-Christ. Today he is called the deputy of our (communist) establishment. Actually he hardly deserves the attention given to him in this report, except that he is a typical example of the countless bureaucrats who, since the early 1970's, have either prohibited or called the police to disperse a number of similar musical events. It is symptomatic of our time to direct hate and suspicion against people who want nothing

more than to create their own art, an art they feel compelled to express in an era that stubbornly refuses to concede that the first and foremost mission of art is to serve people who wish to live together in truth.

### **Organized Disturbance of the Peace –The Plastic People of the Universe, Prague 1968 – 1989**

*“We can’t give up now, even if we wanted to. What else would people do for fun?”*  
-Milan Hlavsa, founder of The Plastic People of the Universe (*Jirous, pg. 62*)

The Plastic People of the Universe played a role in underground political scene in the Czech Republic after the Soviet invasion to end the Prague Spring on August 21, 1968. Different regimes had had an impact on what kind of music was popular, and this was no exception. Nazis had banned jazz in 1939 when Germany occupied Czechoslovakia. By 1945, the Czechoslovakian communist regime became more lenient toward jazz. The regime was especially tolerant toward Czechoslovak jazz. The early 1960’s were fertile ground for rock music in the East. “Beatlemania tore through the ‘Iron Curtain’ as if it was hardly there” (Stoppard). Youth under the Soviet dictatorship embraced the rock trend from the West and began creating its own culture of rock’n’roll. Hundreds of underground garage bands were formed in Prague alone, but most of them did not rise to fame. They played for the sake of playing. They had previously been banned from playing due to lack of musical education (or the unwillingness to submit to a prescribed music education regime) and restrictions on what class group of people were allowed to play music (*Jirous, pg. 58*).

## **Vrat'a Brabenec**

Vrat'a Brabenec of The Plastic People of the Universe was interviewed as a primary source February 22, 2010. He was a pivotal member when he joined the group in 1972. Even in 2010, he maintains an underground celebrity status. Most recently, he was asked to inaugurate the new album Jeskyne by Už Jsme Doma (who receive their own section in this paper). This represents the solidarity between musicians who experienced the same oppression under the communist regime. Both Wanek of Už Jsme Doma and Brabenec contribute first-hand accounts to this paper of incarceration and police harassment. He is an unusual mixture of feisty eloquence and unruly introspection. Though he has been interviewed countless times for publications on several continents, I found his contribution to this paper valuable in that it contains information about his early life as well as several scenarios which are not readily available in interviews elsewhere.



Above, Brabenec (second from the right) with the Plastic People of the Universe on the album cover for Egon Bondy's Happy Hearts Club Banned, released abroad in

1978 and smuggled back into Czechoslovakia. Released in the Czech Republic in 2001. ([www.plasticpeople.eu](http://www.plasticpeople.eu))



Above, Vrat'a Brabenec celebrates a new album in 2010 with Už Jsme Doma at Palác Acropolis in Prague. Source: [www.uzjsmedoma.com](http://www.uzjsmedoma.com)

Brabenec, born in 1943, began to play the saxophone in 1957. Though he wanted to play the trumpet, he began with the clarinet because there were spaces at the local music school available to those willing to become clarinet students. In 1957 he purchased his first saxophone with money he earned working a summer gardening job. The saxophone cost 800 Crowns and Brabanec had been earning 2.18 Crowns an hour, so his parents helped make up the difference. It was during this time he was influenced by the music of Elvis and especially by Radio Luxembourg, which had signal accessible in Czechoslovakia. In 1958, he played his first rock concert. That

same year, Brabenec heard music from the World's Fair in Brussels, which heavily influenced him. Jazz forms he had not previously heard were broadcast, causing him to look up to jazz musicians and rock musicians less so. He says, "Charlie Parker is the Mozart of sax." The World Fair in Brussels was the first world fair to take place after World War II, so it bore special significance (Expo 58).

The story of Brabenec's first soprano saxophone is a very sad one. According to him, he was offered the saxophone for 600 Crowns. It had belonged to a Jewish saxophone player at Terezín concentration camp who was able to play one so well there before being taken to Auschwitz. The original owner asked that it be found a good home because he knew he would probably not be alive very long. In 1981, Brabenec was forced to sell the saxophone at a bazaar at Národní Třída in Prague for 1000 Crowns because he was low on funds and had to support his two-year-old daughter.

### **On Being Stubborn**

"We were stubborn. A person should be stubborn." He explains that the Plastic people were not fighting against the state. They were not guerillas; they were just trying to live their lives the way they wanted to. He recounts a recent interview with the BBC when the interviewer noted that plastic means quite flexible in English. That was not the case for The Plastic People of the Universe. Brabenec says they were not only stubborn, but independent as well. He says he didn't want to sing in English or copy American music because it had already been done. It did not push the envelope and was a mere emulation of what was already being done in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere. They relied heavily on Egon Bondy's poetry for lyrics. Bondy will be discussed later in this paper, but it is important to mention the friendship between



Bondy, Brabenec and the rest of the band. According to Brabenec, Bondy was “philosopher, poet., and agent!” He had been commissioned by the secret police to report on the activities of his friends—but he told the Plastic People this. So, when they began to discuss anything of political importance that would have to be reported to the secret police, Bundy would suggest they wait to discuss it later. Ladislav Kilma’s texts were also used for Plastic People songs and Brabenec has also written many texts for the band as well.

Though the Plastic People are well known as having a political significance as an underground band during communism, they only had one song with political lyrics. Brabenec says that he originally thought the lyrics had been written by Bondy, but later found this to be untrue. In the early 1980’s when in Vienna, Brabenec happened to meet the former editor for Rudé Právo, Czechoslovakia’s heavily propagandistic newspaper. The editor claimed that the lyrics for “One Hundred Points” were his. The lyrics said communists were “afraid of the old for their memory, of the young for their innocence, even of schoolchildren, of the dead and their funerals, of graves and the flowers people put on them, of churches, priests and nuns, of workers, of party members, of those who are not in the party, of science, of art, of books and poems, of theatres and films, of records and tapes, of writers and poets, of journalists, of actors, of painters and sculptors, of musicians and singers, of radio stations, of TV satellites, of free flow of information, of foreign literature and papers, of technological progress, of printing presses, duplicators and xeroxes, of typewriters, of photo-telegraphs, of automatic telecommunications abroad, of letters, of telephones, to let people out, to let people in, of the left, of the right, of departure of the Soviet troops, of changes of the ruling clique in Moscow, of *détente*, of treaties

have signed, for the treaties have signed, of their own police, of the spies, for their spies, of chess-players, of tennis-players, of hockey-players, of gymnast girls, of St. Wenceslas, of Master Jan Hus, of all the saints, of gifts to the kids on St Nicholas, of Santa Claus, of knapsacks being put on the statues of Lenin, of archives, of historians, of economists, of sociologists, of philosophers, of physicists, of physicians, of political prisoners, of the families of prisoners, of today's evening, of tomorrow's morning, of each and every day, of the future, of old age, of heart attacks and cirrhosis, even of that tiny trace of conscience that may still be left in them, out in the streets, inside their castle ghettos, of their families, of their relatives, of their former friends and comrades, of their present friends and comrades, of each other, of what they have said, for their position, of water and fire, of wet and dry, of snow, of wind, of frost and heat, of noise and peace, of light and darkness, of joy and sadness, of jokes, of the upright, of the honest, of the educated, of the talented, of Marx, of Lenin, of all our dead presidents, of truth, of freedom, of democracy, of Human Rights' Charter, of socialism. (Source: International Socialism)

These lyrics were, for obvious reasons, not viewed favorably by the communist authorities. At the same time the list in its comprehensiveness spans the spectrum from literature, professions and attributes of people, aspects of the party itself, as well as emotions.

The band was often harassed by the officials. Sometimes ID's were checked several times at pubs. One had to prove they had a permanent place to stay as well as a job. In the 1970's, Vrat'a Brabenec was a member of the agricultural cooperative. When he was stopped in the city, the police would ask him, "Co vy děláte?" (What do *you*

do?) And he would answer “Jsem traktorist” (I drive a tractor.) Today, he carries only a public transportation pass. The few times he has been asked to produce his ID, he says “I am a Plastic Person of the Universe. Do you know who I am?”

Brabenec says, “The 60’s and 70’s –they were good times.” In 1973, the band received a musicians license, but it was revoked within two weeks. One year later in 1974, the Plastic People were set to play a show in Ceske Budejovice. Most of the audience were arrested and the Plastic People were officially blacklisted (Czechmate). Brabenec says that they played very little from 1974 until 1981 ---as little as once or twice a year. This did not keep them from being arrested in 1976. Brabenec spent eight months being interrogated. “Sometimes it was difficult, but usually it was stupid. Absolutely stupid. They didn’t ask me for some things that could be useful,” he says. As written by Český Rozhlas, Vaclav Havel commented: *“When they arrested the Plastic People we - I and a number of friends - felt that this was something very dangerous. It was a warning signal”* (Český Rozhlas).

Charta 77 states “Tens of thousands of citizens are not allowed to work in their own branches simply because they hold opinions which differ from official opinions. At the same time they are frequently the object of the most varied forms of discrimination and persecution on the part of the authorities and social organizations; they are deprived of any possibility for defending themselves and are virtually becoming victims of apartheid” (Charles University Documents).

Brabenec signed Charta 77 after being released from interrogation. As many others, the regime treated him as a traitor and renegade (Česky Rozhlas). According to Brabenec, he was asked if wanted to become an informing agent. The agent told him that he would not be able to go back to landscaping. Brabenec simply responded, “I know.”

The question may not have been blatantly: will you become an informant? But the message was still clear. In the same regard, The Plastic People’s lyrics were not political nor were they intended to be political, but for many Czechs the message of underground resistance to the system was understood. It is not so much what they were saying, but that they were saying something (anything) after they had been instructed not to that served as a beacon to others. Though the directness of role of the PPU’s in the deterioration of the regime is up for questioning, the legacy that has been propagated is that the willingness of the band’s members to resist encouraged others to resist in their own way. Perhaps the resistance may not have been as piquant as the band members’ –for example it may have merely inspired some to embrace a more alternative lifestyle. Interestingly, when speaking with Václav Křístek (producer of part of the Česká Televize Bigbít series), he mentioned that many people didn’t know exactly what The Plastic People looked like, nor did they know what their songs sounded like. But the mere fact that they existed and were playing shows illegally –even after harassment and arrest—were enough to ignite inspiration in those of similar sentiment – even if they weren’t rock musicians or artists of any kind.

After his arrest, Brabenec was no longer allowed to work as “traktorist” and was forced to work as a cowboy in Bohemia. After a one month stint, his contract was not renewed. Then he began to work as “some stupid helper in some stupid institution.” Brabenec is a horticulturist and a musician—and just as Charta 77 suggested, as a citizen with thoughts that differed from the official line of thought, he was forbidden to pursue his line of work and forced into something meant to be soul breaking. But Brabenec is stubborn. He is individualistically defiant –and his example shone as a beacon for others on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain. Křístek and Diestler, in their interview with me for this paper, noted that the attempted subversion of Brabenec and others had the exact opposite effect desired by the state—The Plastic People were heralded as pillars of the underground.

Brabenec was forced to move to Canada in 1982. He stayed there until 1997 when Vaclav Havel invited him to play at Prague Castle for the 20-year anniversary of Charta 77. Brabenec chose to return to his native country and pick up where he left off—playing with the Plastic People of the Universe.

**Egon Bondy: Friend of the Plastic People of the Universe, philosopher, agent, lyricist and political analyst.**

Egon Bondy wrote many of the Plastic People of the Universe's early lyrics. He was a friend of Vrat'a Brabenec, as well as other members of the band. Though the band claims that they were not attempting to write political songs or have political influence, Bondy was heavily involved in political thought. He held the belief that Czechoslovakia followed precepts which were skewed from pure socialist thought. The term 'second culture,' which refers to the underground movement was coined by Bondy in his 1974 novel *Invalidní sourozenci* ("Invalid Siblings") (Williamson). Set in the future, the term invalid was meant to refer to artists who were outside the realm of the society run by communist regime. In a 1991 interview, he said of the underground: "The Underground was a very interesting phenomenon. Its main rules were very much like the hippie movements in the United States, but it went in a somewhat different direction" (Steinhardt). This is substantiated by Jonsson's thoughts elsewhere in this paper—though the movement was marked by its alternative nature (or second culture), it was not a replica of the movement which took place in the United States during the 1960's and 70's, as the political and social conditions were vastly different.

The kind of second culture that was occurring in the 1960's and 1970's in the United States was a reaction to the straight-laced ideals of the 1950's. The 1950's in the US brought on a modernization that popularized subdivision housing and more widespread use of the automobile. Soldiers returning home from World War II were awarded scholarships to study and were able to subsidize a lifestyle that attempted to stabilize society. People clung to roles (gender roles, as one example) as an attempt to normalize what the country had undergone—1950's US culture may be seen as an

attempt to recover normality after the brutality of the Second World War. For one thing, the 1960's and 1970's were a time of rebellion against these ideas. Outwardly, this may have appeared to European nations as a veritable letting loose at the collar. The intricacies of causality were not the same for the spirit of the 1960's and 70's in the United States and the Czechoslovakia, but the idea the movements in the US invoked for the Czechs and Slovaks encompassed the passionate freedom they possessed and yearned to express.

As Bondy recalls, "From the 1970s until 1987, every student in Czechoslovakia was afraid to meet us in the street, afraid to speak with us, afraid to own or even read our publications--our press and samizdats. They denounced us at every opportunity... Everyone who lived through this time knows it. But now there is silence about this subject, because of the legend that students created the 17th of November and the Velvet Revolution. It's not true" (Steinhardt). As stated above, Mr. Schneider related that many students were encouraged not to sign the charter. In some cases, their names were erased! The movement logically calculated the loss of the educated signators to the greater cause than the loss of one signature to the document. Indubitably, both of these accounts are true.

Though it is typically reported that Charta 77 rose up from the underground movement in Czechoslovakia, Bondy claimed that it was created by three groups: communists, 1968's socialist movement and Christians with some figureheads such as Havel thrown in for good measure. In fact, he claims to have been nearly the only member of the underground movement who was involved at its inception. Furthermore, he reports that very few students were willing to associate with the Underground or sign the charter until 1987 when a thaw seemed closer at hand

(Steinhardt). This is incongruous to other reports that students were willing to risk arrest to attend illegal concerts or post messages of thanks and peace on the Lennon Wall. The discrepancy must be explained by the fact that history, when recounted by one who has lived it, tends to be subjective. I would argue that Bondy makes these claims because the students and underground figures other than himself (and other than the Plastic People of the Universe) yearned for a different kind of change than that desired by Bondy. The claim that students avoided the underground members in the street seems incongruous with Křístek and Diestler's remarks that many people didn't even know what the Plastic People of the Universe, musical leaders of the underground movement, looked like. If this is the case, it seems doubtful that history has been revised so much so quickly that we can take Bondy's claims at face value. It is important, however, to take them into account when considering the views and very existence of varying factions among those in the underground.

In an article in the Independent marking Bondy's death, Pavla Jonssonová, Darrell Jonson's wife and 1980's girl band post-punk icon, remarks: "In the late Seventies young people were so excited about sharing the documents of Charter 77 and distributing various forms of the samizdat writers, be it Havel, Vaculik or Grusa, but especially we loved Egon Bondy . . . for us the most exciting figure because as a revolutionary philosopher and poet he combined everything that we expected of a hero and a literary hero at that" (Williamson).

Bondy passed away in 2007 in Bratislava. His poetry and political writings are available in many languages (Williamson). There have also been various interviews before and after his death with those close to him to determine his level of sway. In my opinion, a survey of those living in the 1960's and 70's who were aware of the underground's existence but either excluded from it or simply not in contact with it or



those in what Bondy may have termed the first culture to shed more light on his effects, perceived or otherwise, on political thought through his lyrics at that time.

### **An Outsider's Thought's on the Underground Movement**

It occurs to me that the legend surrounding a movement can be more powerful than the message it is trying (or in the Plastic People of the Underground's case--perhaps not trying) to convey. Undoubtedly, there is a lot of literature surrounding the movement and its figures—specifically the few bands who stand out in history as those who went to jail for playing music. In the same breath, there were many who were playing rock or jazz who were persecuted by the police whose names have not, for some reason or other, made it into the halls of underground notoriety. Though these now well known bands, such as the Plastic People, Psí Vojáci, and Už Jsme Doma certainly played a role in the political developments, especially those which would eventually manifest themselves as Charta 77—sure they were others who were inspirational and now unknown. There cannot be a concrete answer as to why the legends of the bands listed above have endured for thirty and forty years. In many cases, the flame may have been fanned as it is a journalist good scoop. Without a doubt, these legends that are well known even to many in other countries who may have never set foot on Czech or Slovak soil know of the role of music, especially rock music, in the events leading up to the Velvet Revolution. They add to the romanticism of the country as well as the music.

## **Darrell Jonsson**

Musical ethnographer Darrell Jonsson was interviewed as a primary source for his paper. The interview took place May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010 at a coffee house in Prague. His background is in art anthropology as well as economics. His views of the Czech lands as a bastion of linguistic resistance stem from his upbringing. In Canada, his Icelandic grandmother refused to speak English until the day she died, clinging to her native tongue. His mother was a devout Maoist. Jonsson says these are two aspects that must be taken into account when interpreting his words as a musical ethnographer. His perspective on music and culture is that what is now dominant is not necessarily what it is really all about. There are currents that we are not able to see because we are currently in them. Though he studied Icelandic folklore, he has spent the last ten years focused on what he terms the *Slavonic impulse*.

He stresses there is confusion between the terms alternative, alternativa and underground. They are used interchangeably, though they are not congruous. The alternative trend that resonated from Athens, Georgia and Seattle are not the same as the alternativa scene in the Czech Republic. They have different musical styles as well as differing cultural implications. It is also not the same as the current of music that took place in England at the same time. Additionally, the US term alternative, the British term alternative, and Czech alternativa do not represent the Czech underground movement that began to occur in the 1960's and 70's. In a November 25<sup>th</sup> article in 2004 printed in the Prague Post, Jonsson succinctly postulated the following:

“In the Czech Republic 'Alternativa' described a more challenged social and musical realities. Although the Czech “Alternativa” music scene, shared some similarities

to the post punk 'Alternative' scene in the west, it was formed by Polish, Czech, East German 20th century electronic music and poetry combined with regional avant-garde jazz-fusion" (Prague Post). The article goes on to clarify the reason *alternativa* existed in the first place. In the 1980's, all rock music was considered by the Czech state to directly or indirectly contribute to anti-communist movement. Though some in the *alternativa* movement were involved in subversive activities such as *samizdat*, it can hardly be said the primary purpose of the musical movement was to destabilize the establishment. Quite simply, alternative music in the United States (such as groups popular in the 1980's and 1990's like REM) were simply an alternative to the other kinds of music that were available at the time. It was music that attempted to be something different – a genre not yet recognized by the mainstream. Similarly, *alternativa* in the Prague in approximately the same time period was an alternative to the state-sanctioned tunes available.

Additionally, Jonsson notes that it is important to remember, political oppression was not static. This also played a role in the formation of the underground and *alternativa* movements. According to Křístek and Diestler, after the Plastic People of the Universe were arrested in 1976 and some were forced into exile in the early 80's, the regime thought it best to go easy on musicians so as not to look too harsh to the outside world. I would hypothesize that this also had to do with pressure coming from professionals and upstanding dissidents. The PPU trial of 1976, Mr. Schneider informed me elsewhere in this paper, brought together a faction of professionals (the aforementioned upstanding dissidents) with members of the underground movement who may have been less professionally or legally able to defend their positions. When the state went after the Plastic People of the Universe, they not only raised some eyebrows about the totalitarian intent of the government toward its people (in

the sense that it extended into the cultural realm of music that was purported to not carry any political intentions at all), they brought groups of people together that under normal circumstances would not have communicated.

In the same breath, British alternative celebrities such as Chris Cutler of British avant-rock group Henry Cow and Fred Firth had a large impact on the Czech alternativa scene. Jonsson reported that he would file Už Jsme Doma in the alternativa category, and Mirek Wanek expressed to him in an interview the importance of Cutler and Firth's appearance in Prague were inspirational. This is to illustrate the influences outside and western music naturally had on musicians like Wanek and the entire alternativa scene. Indubitably, these musicians' open outlook on music from the west lent itself to the idea, in the aforementioned 2004 Prague Post article, that all rock music was inherently anti-communist.

One difference is that alternativa was never a marketing categorization in the Czech Republic, whereas its linguistically similar counterparts elsewhere were. For example, go into any large music outlet in the capital city such as Bonton and you will find albums filed away under genres such as jazz, rock, classical and so forth. It is not likely you will find an alternativa section. On the other hand, enter a Tower records in London or New York City and you most certainly find an alternative section. In the Czech Republic, those artists who consider themselves alternativa or are so categorized by music ethnologists such as Jonsson are simply filed away under other monikers. In Bonton, you will find Už Jsme Doma albums tucked away under the rock label, while at smaller retailers (also in Prague) you are likely to find Už Jsme

Doma under Czech Music. One may find it a tad ironic that music that was once considered anti-communist, therefore anti-state is now labeled “Czech.”

Alternativa and alternative differ to underground in the sense that the underground encompassed a perceived lifestyle that was, to varying degrees, more closely associated with political dissidence. Their main similarity lies in their mere existence of being outside the mainstream. Certainly there are overlaps of all three, but the term underground is more widely used and understood to have been the umbrella movement that helped oil the wheels of political change.

Another difference is the social precept of the underground set has been a different relation with alcohol than is present in the alternativa set. According to Jonsson, underground members maybe considered more likely to overindulge. The underground also has a reputation for being hermetic and cliquish, though it is hard to say if that was due to the illegal nature of their shows or if it was a particular mindset. Whatever the cause, this claim (substantiated by Křístek and Diestler), illustrates varying non-mainstream music that is now well known as well as well documented.

Jonsson goes against the grain to say that the American Beatnik movement had little to nil to do with the underground movement in Czechoslovakia. It is now considered an accepted fact that there is a strong tie binding the two, but Jonsson argues that this view illustrates a very colonialist attitude. He believes the underground movement more closely mirrors postwar European poetry in the 1950’s which expressed the

distress of nations which had undergone vast stretches of turmoil. More closely, the current of underground Czech music relates to Dadaism, according to Jonsson. He says, “It is very hard to get past this in the post Stalinist realm—there is a lot of Slavonic input which gets completely swept under the rug. There were also a lot of impulses coming directly from Germany.” Krautrock from Germany also heavily influenced music of underground such as the Plastics, in his view. German groups like Faust had a heavier influence on the bands than the Velvet Underground and Lou Reed. That is not to completely rule out the role of the Velvet Underground, as it sparked the inception of countless bands across the globe. Jonsson's focus is on the role of Slavonic and neighboring countries' effects on Czech music. He believes it may take the space another generation in order to get to the level of abstraction that would offer a better view. One obfuscating factor is that the German avant-garde music that was being created behind the Iron Curtain was originating from far-left leaning musicians. At the same time, it was the far-left which was oppressing the underground musicians in Czechoslovakia.

Jonsson feels that more research into intrinsic Slavonic influence on music on the last few centuries deserves more research. Interestingly, just as Lavash mentions, Jonsson believes ska is related to Czech's native music, polka. “If you take the beat of polka and you move the accent on one beat, you have reggae or ska,” he says. One prime example of this is visible in the Czech band Traband. He says that the culture surrounding polka, including the dance, is visible in Prague's current lively ska and reggae scene. Jonsson recalls seeing Traband for the first time in the late 1990's: It was so close to polka that it was polka. Czechs were looking around at each other like ‘Is it cool to dance now?’” And suddenly, they were dancing the polka, more or less.

As for the current live music venue scene in Prague, Jonsson denotes two major factors to its demise in the late 1990's. As Zawackzi and Lavash note, DJ culture played a large part and still does today. Another factor also played a role. In the early 1990's, there was heavy demand for Czech bands to tour outside the Czech Republic, specifically up to the Scandinavian countries. Within six or seven years, they had saturated the market and there was no longer a demand for them abroad. As demand dwindled, so did the lucrative feature of touring and even producing music at home. This played a role in a decreasing number of small Czech bands. But Jonsson says that Czech small venue music is alive and well. His role as a writer for the Prague Post has put him in touch with a multitude of Czech bands that play music from every conceivable genre. He is of the mindset that something else is happening here now—a Slavonic influenced revival of sorts.

### **Václav Křístek and Radek Diestler**

Vaclav Křístek and Radek Diestler were interviewed as original sources for this paper. Křístek is the director of many of the Bigbít segments in the Czech Television documentary series on music in the Czech Republic. He is a wealth of knowledge in that he has personal accounts of all decades about which I inquired as well as a vast knowledge from creating his informative television program. Radek Diestler is a music historian who has worked together with Křístek over the past few years to provide information for a wide range of music from both within the Czech Republic and abroad. Speaking with these two experts provided a basis for better understanding the Czech grasp of international and domestic music culture.

Bigbít (pronounced like big beat) was the term used by Czechs to describe the music which was sweeping the globe in the 1960's. According to Diestler, rock 'n' roll was a kind of dirty word in Czechoslovakia. Youth were encouraged to ignore its existence or shun it altogether. The term Bigbít offered some convenient obscurity as well. Some believed that it referred to the steady tempo and rhythms of the music rather than rock. This allowed for the term's umbrella to encompass a wide range of music and quickly developed as its own Czech genre—albeit under a different moniker. Czechs did not simply want to copy rock 'n' roll and call it Bigbít. I see this as proof that they wished to broaden their horizons musically to accept and explore outside influences and customize it to express their own cultural identity. We see this in the 1980's move toward increasingly Czech lyrics. This can also be seen in the widespread adoption of country music to the Czech Republic. The genre originated in the United States, but the country music you will encounter in the Czech Republic is uniquely and unmistakably Czech.

Other outside influences such as the Beat Movement can be interpreted in varying ways and to varying degrees of penetration into the culture over the years. Though Jonsson believes that the Beatniks had less effect on the underground movement, Křístek and Diestler say that the Beat texts were very popular because people in Czechoslovakia were interested in most things from the West. Even if this is the case, I believe that the truth most likely lies in between the two. Though songs and the movement were influenced by poets like Ginsberg, their influence has possibly been inflated because it is an easy explanation—and one that strokes the Western ego. It



also has a romantic tone about it, which pairs nicely with the mystical perception of the Czech underground of the 60's and 70's. But I think that buying into the notion that Czechs and Slovaks worshipped all things western is belittling to the legacy of daring dissidents and the whole of Czechoslovak history.

The state did all that it could to discourage the people from listening to and being influenced by rock 'n' roll. It can now be viewed as comic that Czechoslovakia's Hitparáda was aired at the exact same time as Radio Free Europe's hour for playing music geared toward youth. Hitparáda was state-controlled while Radio Free Europe's broadcasts were under the guidance of the United States and other Western powers. Though it was frustrating, as Křístek points out, it also illustrates the lengths the state would go to discourage youth from listening to foreign music with lyrics in the English and other languages.

In the 1980's, a paradox occurred. All of a sudden, alternativa and post-punk bands among others were singing in Czech. They embraced their own language and were creating music popular among their peers. According to Křístek and Diestler, the fact that they were communicating their songs in Czech became a problem for the state, whereas in the 1970's there was push for musicians to steer clear of English. Articles were published on the obscenities in English lyrics during the 1960's, but by the 1980's the state's official stance had somewhat changed. On the whole today, Czechs as well as Slovaks speak English well, but before 1989 there were less opportunities for them to learn the language well. Without a large population of native English speaking teachers or plethora of English language media, intense discipline was

required to learn English well. Lyrics created in English were often very basic and sometimes incorrect. More importantly, they were not involved enough to carry political messages. But when songs lyrics were crafted in the native language of Czech or Slovak, they could convey more precise messages if they so desired.

Křístek and Diestler talk about how music was distributed against the will of the state. Though it may not have been illegal, it was officially frowned upon. People were intercepting a lot of television from the West along the borders of Germany and Austria. Křístek specifically mentions “Bayern 3” from Germany and stations from Vienna as popular sources for music and media from western countries. In the early 1980’s, a Police concert which took place in Vienna drew many Czechs hundreds of kilometers to watch the show on friends’ televisions receiving the foreign signals. The influence of the music and information available from Austrian and German signals not only influenced musical styles in the Czechoslovakia, but had a strong impact on clothing as well. Young Czechs and Slovaks strove to dress like their western counterparts did on television. This is not so different from today and the trend can be found in every country and culture. In the same hungry vein toward western rock, Křístek and Diestler report that hoards of Czechs from Prague traveled all the way to Hungary to attend a Talking Heads. When one takes into account the amount of trouble people were willing to go to see a band such as the Talking Heads, the magnitude of their impact becomes more understandable. I asked Křístek if he understood the Talking Heads’ lyrics as they are often quite politically charged, though they were often critical of consumerism and not communism. For example from the song *“Don’t worry about the Government”* :

Some civil servants are just like my loved ones  
They work so hard and they try to be strong  
I'm a lucky guy to live in my building  
They all need buildings to help them along

It's over there, it's over there  
My building has every convenience  
It's gonna make life easy for me  
It's gonna be easy to get things done  
I will relax along with my loved ones

(Source: The Talking Heads)

Křístek says they may not have understood all of the lyrics, but they certainly understood the *sentiment* behind the lyrics. If you take the lyrics above at face value, they may not seem political at all. But the moment a bit of cynicism is thrown into the equation, it becomes easy to see that these lyrics are a statement on government, albeit not on Czechoslovak government, but most likely on that of America. No matter the target, the spirit of political criticism is encompassed within the message – and that was something that was not openly tolerated in the early 1980's in Prague.

Additionally, the two music experts point out that there was a big difference between Prague and smaller cities. The mindset differed between the two as the volume of

political and musical material was available. For example, things were freer along the border than in cities such as Hradec Kralové and Ostrava. Materials were more readily available and citizens were able to pick up radio and television stations that may not have been available to those living deeper in the country. On the other hand, the two said that anything of any significance issued in western countries would be available throughout Czechoslovakia within 14 days in any case. One enabler was the ‘Burza Desek’ (a record exchange), which would take place underneath the Stalin statue below Letna Park in Prague. This was the place to come to get copies of all things rare and western and take them home to copy on them for friends. Needless to say, this piracy created a demand for the recordings merely from the fact that it was mildly illegal and by those who were interested in western music, thought and culture –considered cool. A copy of a new Rolling Stones album might be smuggled in on the border and copies would make the way to the ‘Burza Desek.’ Pragers would get their hands on it and make more copies to be dispersed throughout the city. As the audio technology of the time relied upon phonograph and tape, the fidelity of each recording diminished, sometimes leaving an album with barely distinguishable lyrics.

After 1987, a year also referenced by Bondy, Křístek and Diestler say that the state forces no longer had the power to enforce heavy bans on music. Gorbachev visited and the signal was clear to many musicians: things were about to lighten up. This is why, according to Bondy, students began to sign Charta 77 only after 1987.

### **The 1980's as a marker of the musical thaw**

**Už Jsme Doma:** From underground resistance band to popular Czech band, this band's enduring lifespan from the mid-eighties right through present day are a testament to the hardships of the music scene in the 1980's in the Czech Republic as well as an indicator for successful Czech progressive rock in the 2000's.

Už Jsme Doma is a rock band of the progressive genre. They came together in Teplice in 1985 and Mirek Wanek joined them in 1986. He was to perform a variety of tasks on various instruments in the band before becoming the main lyricist, singer and guitar player. They were among the underground bands of the 1980's in the Czech Republic that drew official attention due to the nature of their music. They have continued to play until the present day and have a strong following both abroad and at home. Their fan base is not homogenous at all. Followers from the 1980's who are now a bit older still frequent their shows alongside a much younger group of Už Jsme Doma fans. The band, whose name means "we're already home" have their beginning in the tepid waters of oppression, but have blossomed into an internationally renowned representation of modern Czech music.

In a recent interview with Mattoni Music Review, Mirek Wanek explains that he is extremely grateful to those who influenced the fall of the "perverse" system. Wanek is a musical dissident who, though not as internationally recognized as the Plastic People of the Universe members, played a pivotal role in underground music and the underground movement of the 1980's. Over the last 33 years, he has been able to

fulfill his dream of playing music, not only in his hometown Teplice, but in over thirty countries throughout the world—which would not have been possible had communism not fallen (Mattoni Music Zone).

Wanek was interviewed as a primary source to document the struggle in the 1980's between bands and the police. The questions were focused on the public's reaction to the band in the 1980s and now. I focused one question specifically on an event called The Concert of Side Bands. This was especially interesting because Wanek is able to describe play by play what took place around the concert. It is also the first time he met the band, which had already been in existence one year, and was the platform for his later joining Už Jsme Doma. Aside from the musical aspect of the event, a striking feature is the risks some Czechs were willing to take to attend a concert. Wanek asserts that this was one way to resist the establishment.

As a side note, Mirek Wanek's English was nearly impeccable, but I have made some minor adjustments in grammar. I have tried to uphold the integrity of his wording and the descriptive nature of his recounting the past. He writes lyrics in English as well as in Czech and has the gravity of speech befitting what he truly is: a poet, lyricist, musician, and pillar of the former underground music scene in the Czech Republic.

“The police visited a lot of shows and the result was mainly that they cancelled them. Sometimes it was a "legal" show - it means you needed to go some office and apply for permit. In papers you displayed some fake reason for the show, as "socialist youth

entertainment afternoon" or "fashion exhibition," etc. and sometimes (it was our case with Fourth Price Band) you display fake "ID" of band (this was also necessary paper - each band had to have some kind of ID, which you could get only when you underwent through some kind of exam, mostly with some ideological questions).”

Fourth Price Band was Wanek’s original punk band from Teplice, which began playing in 1981. It drew a lot of attention from the authorities because of the kind of music they were playing. In Czech, the term fourth price band refers to a band willing to perform for very little money. Wanek continues, “So now you had "legal" show, but the secret police many times got some info from their collaborators. So, they came to the show, they checked the ID of each person in audience and they usually arrested the band for 24 or 48 hours. The danger was, of course, in playing specific songs itself, but many times they didn't like to arrest you for "political" reason (because in fact the law wasn't so strict), but they tried to "criminalize" you with for example discovering your fake papers. In that case you broke the law by falsifying an official document and it was danger of two years in jail. There were not so many cases that they used that punishment, but that was one of the way, how to "hire" collaborators. Police used often also to switch off the electricity and they did it often even if the show was legally *legal*. One office often didn’t know what the other office was doing.

“And besides that there were clearly illegal shows-- without any permit or any even trying to get one. Some bands never played that game with the system—the Plastic People of the Universe, for example These shows were dangerous, of course for, the band members-- but for audience too. Fourth Price Band did several of these shows and my eyes were always glued to the front door I was plagued by some sort of

stomach troubles. Many times I was at these shows as well as audience member and I have several experiences with "bad ending"—specifically being beaten and spending 48 hours in jail.

“But people visited these shows anyway. Each show was a fest and there were hundreds and hundreds of people there. People traveled for these rare shows up to 200 and 300 kilometers. There was no advertisement, no internet— not even phone lines common, but all the people knew when and where the show would happen. Of course police often did, as well.

“In fact paradoxically we probably have a better position than young bands of a similar style. Our style is not commercial and does not even follow some common style. So similar bands usually have no promotion, etc. We started in time, when, as I already mentioned each show, regardless of the style or quality, was an exception and a fest and so a lot of people visited them. Attending that kind of show was one of the ways to "fight" the system. So, after the revolution we had sort of a big following and because we play continuously we have had a similar following even until now and even with young people. Often kids of the original audience were from the 80's. But my feeling is that the reason we had and have fans is more due to the music and lyrics we had and have, rather than due to our history. Fourth Price Band might be different story, but Už Jsme Doma people probably respect mainly for their work.”

I asked Mirek Wanek to tell a bit about a famed concert under the name of *Konzert Stráňených Skupin*, or Concert of Side Bands in English.



Well, it was show of three bands from Teplice – Fourth Price Band (as a band with five years experience and as a widely respected band, one of the first and most famous Czech punk bands), Už Jsme Doma (as very beginners - it was their second show in history, in fact I played with Fourth Price Band and not with Už Jsme Doma that time. It was my first time I met Už Jsme Doma and the place where they asked me to join them. And Hluchý Telefon played as well. They are an absolutely unknown—a not so interesting local band. Why the name of show was Concert of Side Bands? I don't have any idea even now. It sounds like nonsense in Czech.

Originally it supposed to happen in Už Jsme Doma's practice space near Panorama in Teplice, but one hour before the beginning police cars surrounded the place (with about ten to fifteen big cars) and they checked the ID of every person who appeared near the place. When we discovered that, we pretended that no show would happen and we used public transport. We told the police we were going home. We carried the guitars and amplifiers. We were a group of about 10 people. Another group used another bus or another line. Hoards of people were on their way to the original site, but the rumor immediately spread over the town that the police were there. So people returned and in about one hour later (which I feel was a miracle). We found a different place on the opposite side of town and the show took place there. The police were still waiting at the original site --more than two hours before they got the info about the new place, but the show had finished by that time.

“The audience got the info about the new site much faster, so the show happened for about 300 people without any real trouble. The secret police were very angry afterward - there were many interrogations later that week. But, the fact is we won

that little battle. These kind of "battles" happened many times and the result was not often that "positive" - I would estimate 9:1, loosing to winning."

One main theme throughout speaking with experts and witnesses of the underground music scene in the Czech Republic was oppression by the secret police. Wanek's words are valuable because they are a first hand account of the events on one particular occasion. It goes without saying that those 300 people who dared to attend the Concert of Side bands in either at its original location or its secondary one, were bravely defiant. The bands that played were certainly defiant as well. According to Wanek, it could be expected for a band to be detained after playing for a day or more. This is a testament to the threat perceived by the state and secret police. It is also a direct testament to the independent and dissident nature of some Czech people in the 1980's. I will venture to say that if punk and hard rock music were considered pushing the envelope in the United States and Britain at the time, the stakes for listening to and performing punk and hard rock music were much higher in Czechoslovakia. Additionally, it is invaluable to chronicle the tribulations of such artists as they are unfathomable for younger generations (both Czech and foreign) living in the Czech Republic today.

"I feel all these songs are like little novels," he says. "All our albums and all the lyrics I wrote for Uz jsme doma are like one continuing story" (Jonsson for The Prague Post).

I cannot help but wonder if youth would be willing to put themselves at such risk to attend concerts nowadays. The variables involved in the cultural, sociological and

primarily political atmosphere of the 60's through 80's (or any era, in fact), cannot be compared to the way things are today. Bluntly put, it is simply a different world.

### **The John Lennon Wall**

Take a look in any guide book of Prague and you will be instructed to stroll through Kampa Park and along the Lennon Wall. The importance of the Lennon Wall in Prague extends beyond the superficial meaning it tends to carry with passersby and tourists in Prague today. The implication behind the existence of the wall is very real and piquantly poignant to the topic of the relation between Czech culture and music. In this case, the relationship between Czech cultures is tangible in terms of its adulation of the mantra of Beatles great, John Lennon. As a counterpoint, the resistance against the existence of the wall is also an indicator of the political situation in the early 1980's. One would be hard-pressed to find a monument laden with such political, social and cultural importance as this wall dedicated to one of the world's most favorite musicians. According to Radio Free Europe, "Since the collapse of communism, the Lennon Wall has come to be seen not only as a memorial to the fallen singer, but also a monument to free speech and to Prague's non-violent rebellion against the repressions of neo-Stalinism."

When John Lennon fans in Prague heard of his shooting on December 8, 1980, they immediately erected an impromptu memorial to the musician. Within just a few days Lennon's portrait along with quotes and lyrics appeared on the wall at *Velkopřerovské náměstí*. The site, in Prague's Malá Strana near Kampa Park, began to be frequented by youth wishing to pay tribute to their fallen hero. The state authorities deemed this

a subversive activity and those who visited the wall were subject to trouble with the police and even time in jail. This is a statement on the view of the oppressive government on music, especially The Beatles. It was understood that music is capable of crossing all borders and the message that music carries cannot be taken lightly. It does have a deep and definite impact. Its existence and the resistance the wall encountered are inherent signs that Lennon's medium, music, held vast amounts of power. John Lennon's message was non-violence and peace. In fact, when interviewed in the 1970's, an interviewer asked how he wished to be remembered after his death. His answer: a peacemaker.

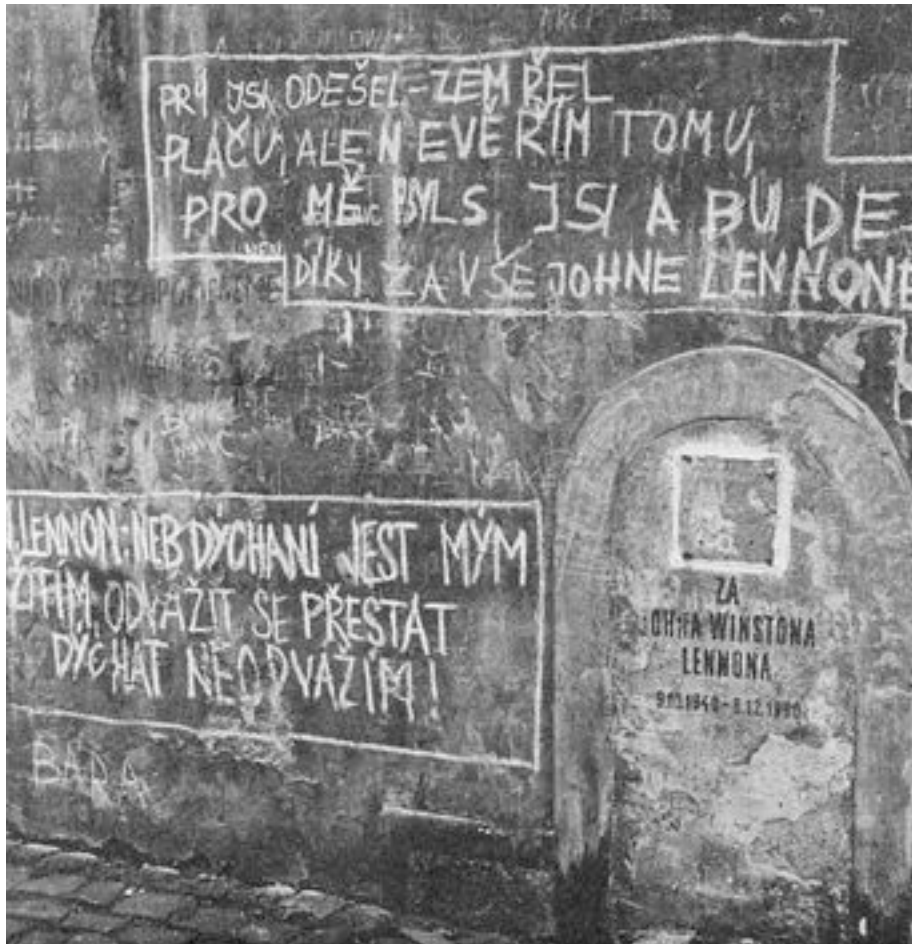
If anything, his senseless death strengthened his message and was strong enough to entice Czechs into risking arrest again and again. Pictures of Lennon along with his lyrics appeared on the wall. Statements such as "Our society is run by insane people for insane objectives. I think we're being run by maniacs for maniacal ends and I think I'm liable to be put away as insane for expressing that. That's what's insane about it" and "A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality" can seem incendiary to totalitarian governments ([john-lennon.com](http://john-lennon.com)).

According to Radio Free Europe, "Lennon memorial marches also started to take place each year around December 8. The marches ultimately became linked to dissident protests on International Human Rights Day -- December 10. Participants during the 1980s were often channeled through a gauntlet of uniformed and plainclothes police. Some were jailed or beaten" (Synovitz for Radio Free Europe). Though not all of the writing on the wall in the 1980's was politically charged, much of it was. It was repeatedly white washed by authorities, but they could not seem to keep it clean. In other words, Czechs took the risk of being arrested and beaten to

write on a wall –the once makeshift tomb for a musician turned permanent. Lennon's lyrics had such an impact, people were willing to put themselves in danger to show their sign of solidarity with the sentiment of the lyrics, the man who had written them, and the other anonymous scrawlers who had taken the exact same chance. The wall represented a means to non-violently resist the communist regime.

My thoughts on the Czech love affair (specifically, though I am aware many if not most cultures entertain this notion) with John Lennon is much aligned with the nature of its infatuation with Allen Ginsberg. The attraction is more what the artist represented than the intricacies of his character. Where Ginsberg represented a rebellious freedom, Lennon may well represent a similar kind of freedom. John Lennon's fame encompassed an arena of the 1960's and 1970's hippie mentality of love and equality. He is one of the obvious pop culture protagonists in this pursuit. Ginsberg's harsh and sometimes purposefully perverse prose and lifestyle appealed to many underground youth and, likewise, Lennon's lifestyle that famously challenged the status quo while advocating non-violence appealed to youth in Czechoslovakia.

The picture below is from the website [johnlennon.cz](http://johnlennon.cz) and depicts the original state of the Lennon Wall. The wall has morphed over time, but its original form was a symbolic grave for the singer. Anyone who walks by may add to the living mural so that it is never the same on any two given days. The wall is owned by the Order of Maltese Knights who allow the writing to continue to accumulate. Over the last 30 years, the political importance of the wall has changed. It began as a memorial to a musician who preached peace and tolerance. Today it is visited by countless tourists, many of who know Lennon's music well. The wall may no longer be politically charged, but its existence and endurance pays homage to the political situation of the 1980's and the sentiment of the Czech people at the time.



Picture from [johnlenon.cz](http://johnlenon.cz)

On the wall: They say that you left, that you died. I cry, but I don't believe it. For me you were and you are. Thank you for everything, John Lennon. Because breathing is my life, I will never dare stop breathing.

The French Embassy, located directly across the way, placed a call to the municipal officials requesting the graffiti on the Lennon wall not removed. It is no longer forbidden to write on the wall, but the current contents make it obvious that not everyone who leaves their mark on Prague's Lennon Wall knows about its historical, political and social significance (Synovitz for Radio Free Europe).

I find the Lennon Wall particularly interesting because it is a physical representation of how the importance of a thing (a song, a movement, or this wall for example) can morph over time. What was once a symbol of rebellion that Czechs valued enough to risk their freedom to scrawl their message upon has become home to tourist-drawn peace symbols and Mother Teresa quotes. There is a touch of irony about this and the gravity of this symbol has been obscured. But what of it? One bright side is that it is no longer necessary. Another bright side is the tourists are allowed to freely explore the beauty of the city and express positive sentiments on this famous wall. This morphing and forgetting of the original symbolic nature of the memorial reminds me of my own position as a foreigner living in the Czech Republic and of my curiosity toward the topic of the social and political aspects surrounding music in an era before I was born and in a country that is not native to me. Though I may read about the significance of the Lennon Wall and can even speak with those who sneaked out into the night to write messages upon it, I will never be capable of grasping the complexity and true nature of the times that ignited the courage of the Czech Underground movement. This is what I find riveting, exciting and challenging.

## The 1990's

*Nebojím se, když něčemu věřím, jdu tam!*

*I am not afraid. When I believe in something, I go after it.*

**--Monika Načeva in a "Týden" interview when asked if she was afraid to leave the mainstream and seek out new ways within the field of music.**

On May 24, 2010 I held an online interview with Monika Načeva as a primary source for alternative music in Prague in the 1990's. Načeva, half Bulgarian and half Czech, is well known to theatre and music lovers for her performances for Divadlo Sklep and later for her contributions to the music scene. Several of her popular songs are "Měsíc," "Udržuj svou ledničku plnou" and "Jiná žena." Her entrance into the world of alternative increased the amount of recognition she received in the Czech Republic in the 1990's. She crossed over from popular theatre performer to popular songstress. She made a daring jump from the alternative scene into the electronic scene, often performing with DJ 5. More recently, Načeva made a musical appearance at an anti-fascist demonstration in Prague for the group "Antifa" in 2008 (Týden).

I chose to speak with her because her music endeavors seem to echo the shift from alternative pop music into a more electronic music based scene in Prague in the 1990's. She is respected as a multi-genre artist. In an interview with "Týden", she declares that she will keep all avenues open to art forms like music and theatre as well as to varying styles. Below I have translated my interview with Monika Načeva. I have attempted to uphold the integrity of her words in my English translation.



**What were the major changes in the Prague music scene in the 1990's from your point of view?**

I never paid attention to the trends and I didn't plan how the album should sound. I'm open to everything. First I have to find a theme, then the right words... and then I search for musicians who have a specific sound according to how they make their music. That can be electronic music where lots of sampled sounds are available or it can be acoustic instruments or even just voice. Of course, I am always inspired by the music around me, which speaks to me. But I don't study music theory.

**Do you feel that your move toward (organically recorded) electronic music mirror the trend of popular music in the Czech Republic from the 80's until today? I don't think it does –**

I will probably disappoint you here... I wasn't all that interested in music. I wanted to act in the theater and that is why I came from a small town to Prague... and got to know people around the theatre. I got lucky with super alternative theatres like A Studio Rubin or Ha-Divadlo. That is probably where my sense for lyrics comes from. Lyrics are the foundation of every composition. I think I leaned toward punk, rock, like Patti Smith and Iggy Pop in those days. As for Czech bands, I liked Už Jsme Doma, Půlnoc, Visací zámek, and Garáž.

**What were you listening to in the 1980's? I have spoken with several people who were listening to bootlegged copies of albums from the album exchange. Were**

**you listening to bootleg albums or more mainstream pop? --I would like to know what influenced your alternative roots in the 1990's and to get a bit of an idea of what teenagers were actually listening to in the 1980's.**

For me, the album *Možnosti tu sou* was a rather rapid shot up. I didn't expect the album to be so popular! Different leaders of the pop music scene started to address me. By this I mean the people who are always the same, the little mafia here... but since I never wanted to do pop music, I preferred to stop and think if I wanted to do music at all and if so what kind... So after two years I released the album *Nebe je Rudy*, which was something completely different and I started down the path as an experimental musician.

I am including the Czech version of this interview as this paper is being submitted in the Czech Republic. Though Načeva's English is superb, she requested the interview be held in Czech. Readers of Czech will note nuances in her Czech responses that I was unable to capture in my English Translation above. Below, find my thoughts on her reactions to my questions.

**Jaké byly podle Vás nejzásadnější změny na pražské scéně od roku 1990? Myslíte si, že váš příklon k (organicky nahrávané) elektronické hudbě odpovídá trendům v české populární hudbě od 80. let do současnosti? Nemyslím si, že tomu tak je...**

Nikdy jsem nepřemýšlela o trendech a ani neplánovala, jak má deska znít! Jsem v tom

otevřená k čemukoli...Nejprve musím najít téma, potom správná slova...a pak hledám muzikanty, kteří podle toho, jakou dělají muziku, tomu dávají specifický zvuk...a to může být jak elektronika/kam se vejde spoustu nahraných zvukových maleb/ tak i akustické nástroje nebo jen hlas. Samozřejmě, že jsem pořád inspirovaná hudbou kolem sebe, která mě oslovuje! Ale nestuduji hudbu teoreticky.

**Co jste poslouchala v 80. letech? Setkala jsem se s mnoha lidmi, kteří poslouchali pirátsky nahrané desky koupené na burze. Poslouchala jste spíš alternativu nebo populární hudbu? Ráda bych věděla, co ovlivnilo vaše alternativní směřování v 90. letech a celkově získala představu o tom, co poslouchali mladí lidé v 80. letech.**

Ted' Vás asi zklamu...ale já jsem se moc hudbou nezajímala. Chtěla jsem hrát divadlo, proto jsem šla z malého města do Prahy...a seznamovala se z lidma kolem divadla. Měla jsem štěstí na super alternativní divadla, jako je A-studio Rubín nebo Ha-divadlo. Tam asi vznikla moje přecitlivělost na texty k písním, které jsou pro mě základní kámen každé skladby. Z hudby jsem, myslím, v té době nejvíc vnímala punck, rock, jako Patti Smith, Iggy Pop. Z kapel u nás asi nejvíc Už jsme doma, Půlnoc, Visací zámek, Garáž.

**Začátkem 90. let, když jste nahrála Možnosti tu jsou, jaké byly tehdejší vlivy v české popmusic? A jaké jsou teď?**

Pro mě deska Možnosti tu sou...v roce 1994 byl docela rychlý nástup! Nečekala jsem, že to bude až tak populární. Začali mě oslovovat různí představitelé POPu...a

myslím, že to jsou pořád stejní lidé, jedna malá mafie u nás...ale jelikož jsem nikdy nechtěla dělat POP, raději jsem se zastavila a zamyslela nad tím, jestli chci dělat vůbec muziku a jakou...tak po dvou letech vzniklo album Nebe je rudy, které bylo úplně jiné...a tím jsem započala dráhu hudební experimentátorky!

### **Analysis of the 1990's through the subject of Monika Načeva**

Monika Načeva continues to create albums with her electronic music counterparts. Her latest album as of 2010, was released in 2007 and is entitled *Mami*. As the title indicates, it carries heavy traces of her role as mother. She has evolved from 1990's theatre start, to alternative music celebrity, music innovator and, more intimately, into the role of mother. Still fiercely independent, she continues branching out and playing with a variety of musicians, including Justin Lavash (also interviewed for this paper).

I propose that Načeva's career over the last 15 years mirrors that of the Czech pop and alternative music scene to some degree. Her 1994 album has a very similar sound to the 1990's bands popular in the US and Britain at the time. Whether it is labeled as post-grunge or alternative, the chord progressions are in holding with the worldwide trend at the time. Načeva made the bold step to break her mould and move forward into the world of electronic music in the Czech Republic. Electronic music has been heralded as the math rock of new Britain for years, and Načeva carries this torch through to today, unafraid to implement new techniques with a variety of musicians. As mentioned earlier, Načeva prefers to speak her native Czech tongue, though she is

very capable of speaking English. Is this a kind of national pride? I believe it is one of the most respectable kinds of national pride. She not only upholds her native language in interview but through her lyrics as well. Arguably, this is why the lyrics she sang in the early and mid-1990's were able to resonate so powerfully with her audiences—both those who knew her from the stage and those who were introduced to her music through other forms of media. This is one vein she has in common with the Czech Republic's treasured Plastic People of the Universe. As mentioned earlier, the addition of Vrat'a Brabenec to the Plastic People of the Universe was on the condition the group would sing in Czech. A parallel may be drawn the two. Both proudly sing in Czech and both are revered as spearheads of the underground alternative movement, Brabenec in the 1970's and 80's and Načeva on a different platform in the 1990's.

One reason I believe Načeva was able to attain fame in the Czech Republic, aside from her obvious talent and lyrical, is her already established presence on stage in Prague. She certainly is not typically considered among the main protagonists of the Czech dissident movement. Firstly, she is too young. Secondly, the basis of her career was garnered under the auspices of state-supported stage. That does not, however, mean that her entity did not inspire a certain level of similar sentiments to the independent and positive aspirations of earlier dissidents. Načeva's lyrics and presence, though it came later, bring forth thoughts of independence and strength.

### **Ed Zawadzki: Integrated Musician Transplant**

Zawadzki offers musician's view of the music scene in Prague through the 1990's to the early 2000's with a focus on small venues and performing with professionally established Czech musicians in the Czech Republic and on the international scene.

Ed Zawadzki was interviewed as a primary source of successfully integrated foreign musician in Prague. He arrived to Prague from Pittsburgh in 1996 and stayed because of the large number of musicians from around the world who were playing and performing in Prague at the time. According to Zawadzki, there was live rock and alternative music in more pubs and venues throughout the city than there are today. Though the venues were not very organized, at least by Pittsburgh standards, musicians were appreciated and paid well. There was a thriving community of music lovers who would regularly go out to see bands performing original work as well as covers. This audience was a robust mix of Czech natives and visitors, both long and short term, from around the world. Zawadzki cites lax visa laws as one reason so many foreign musicians were playing live music in Prague at the time.

There were two main factors in the destruction of the energetic live rock and alternative music scene in Prague at the end of the 1990's. According to Zawadzki, Easy Jet and Očko were heavy forces in shaping how music is appreciated in the Czech Republic up to today. Očko, a television station featuring music videos and music-centered programming, opened in the Czech Republic in 2002. The music that is featured is, according to Zawadzki, not in sync with the underground scene and live

music scene which was taking place in Prague in the 1990's. The emphasis shifted from the live music culture (rock, jazz, folk, bluegrass, etc.) to a culture based around the appearance of music. To quote Zawadzki: "The haircuts and shoes were more important than the bands." Furthermore, Czech MTV was launched in 2009, adding to the hype around non-Czech and non-organic music genres.

Raves and techno parties were already taking place in the Czech Republic by the 1990's, but the introduction of Easy Jet may have contributed heavily to their popularity. Easy Jet is a low-cost airline based in London, which flies to multiple destinations throughout Europe. In London, the 1990's were a time of the techno music boom. If London was one of its epicenters, Easy Jet played a role in exporting the techno music culture to other destinations. Zawadzki notes that travelers from Great Britain brought a demand for techno DJ's and the demand was filled by British DJ's able to fly cheaply on Easy Jet from London. Czech and local techno DJ's were soon able to take center stage—and the demand for live music lessened. Venue and pub owners noted that paying one DJ can be much less expensive than paying for a whole band. These, according to Zawadzki, are several social factors which contributed to the decline in live music venues in Prague toward the end of the 1990's and the beginning of the 2000's.

"It's a cultural city. Shouldn't it be cultural? Maybe it is just business, All the symphonies, all the shows, it's just paid performances. Everything seems to be for tourists here." --a sentiment by Zawadzki, shared by multiple musicians in Prague after the 1990's all the way to the present.

Zawadzki notes that the 1990's offered a platform for many foreign musicians to gain recognition. Among them were many who were mediocre in talent and would not have been able to attract attention in their home countries. The nature of their presence as foreigners or the communities of transplanted foreigners to which they belonged made it possible for musicians with talent of a broad spectrum, some not so talented and some extremely talented, to have the opportunity to play live. This is not to say that all foreign musicians living and performing in Prague in the 1990's were of lesser talent, but that the standards were of a different caliber than many of those places from whence they had come.

As mentioned above, the ubiquity of venues willing to host live music was a major factor in the vibrancy and scope of the live rock and alternative music scene in Prague in the 1990s. The Roxy, still a prominent club in the center of the city in Old Town was a popular destination for live rock and alternative music in the 1990's. This is still the case. Zawadzki played the first "Free Monday" at Roxy with a band called the Ultraphonics. The Ultraphonics was "made up of former members of the Hyena Family, Rány Těla (body wounds) and Liquid Harmony - was very Primal Scream influenced and somehow they all had an obsession with both the Black Crowes and Lenny Kravitz " The band Rány Těla, to quote Zawadzki "were legends here (Prague) in the early 1990's in the underground thing going on between here and Berlin (think Nick Cave, Hugo Race, Fatal Shore and others). Hank Mancini was there leader and has gone on to form some notable groups including the Nihilists and most recently Kill the Dandies - Rány Tela still plays. "Free Mondays," still a feature



at the Roxy, offers a free concert before live DJ's perform late into the evening. This is ostensibly to attract guests who would not otherwise venture out on the first night of the workweek. Zawadki also says, "We did play the first Free Monday ever at Roxy to probably 50 people (despite huge promotion) in 2000 which coincides with the timeline about DJ's taking over the scene here --then and no interest at all in bands. I went to a free Monday a few years later to see some unknowns and it was full every time, meaning that the MTV era of band influence on the next generation had started to kick in here."

Zawadzki was chosen to be interviewed because of his successful integration as a foreigner into the Czech music scene, especially in the 1990's and early 2000's, as well as the continued level of respect he is given by both native Czech and foreign musicians in Prague. He has recorded with Czech artists such as Lucie Bílá and Slovak artists like Dara Rollins. One well-known Czech musician with whom Zawadzki has performed extensively is Ivan Král.

Ivan Král's band offered Zawadzki the opportunity to travel and tour around the Czech Republic and Europe. Král was born in the Czech Republic in 1948. He wrote his first song at age five. At 16, he already had a hit song in Czechoslovakia, called "Pierot." Král's family left Czechoslovakia in 1968 and settled in New York where his father worked as an interpreter for the UN. Král had already had a taste of fame in Czechoslovakia and made sure to put himself back on that path in his early 20's in the United States. In the 1970's he played with Shaun Cassidy and Debbie Harry from the band "Blondie." He also played with John Cale from "The Velvet Underground,"

but nothing concrete was every produced. In 1975, Král was able to join Patti Smith and help write the albums *Horses*, *Radio Ethiopia*, *Easter* and *Wave*. This opened the door for him to play with Iggy Pop on his album *Soldier*. In 1993, Král decided to return to his hometown Prague. In 1994, he received a Czech Grammy and was later awarded Grammys for rock producer of the year in 1995 and 1998. Ivan Král also produced Aneta Langerová's first album. Langerová is and has been a popular Czech musician since the mid 200's (ivankral.net).

Zawadzki's experiences with Ivan Král's band were positive on the whole, and they can be used to characterize one branch of the music experience in the Czech Republic at the end of the 1990's and beginning of the 2000's. Overall, the experience of playing with other good musicians to engaged audiences was a valuable lifetime opportunity. "We played in many cities in the country –really, really great nights," Zawadzki says.

Zawadzki mentions that playing in countries such as Serbia, Hungary and Ukraine was a different experience than playing in the Czech Republic. The Czech music scene even on that high echelon left a bit of organization to be desired. Once, when performing with Král at the famed Palác Akropolis in Prague, Zawadzki showed up for sound check to find that the necessary equipment he had requested was nowhere to be seen. It is normal for musicians to submit a sheet of technical parameters to venues before shows take place so that crews and sound engineers are prepared for the concert. On this occasion, though Zawadzki was performing with a well-loved Czech musician in a wee-respected venue, his request was ignored and he was left to

find the necessary sound equipment for himself in the last minutes before sound check. His pleas for help were met with disdain.

Even on large stages in front of huge audiences, Ivan Král's band was sometimes told to 'turn down.' This would be considered unthinkable in other venues abroad.

Zawadzki notes that even members of The Clash, when they played in Prague, were told to lower their volume.

Narcotics are mentioned several times in the music scene in Prague as a problematic theme, not only by Zawadzki but by Trossman and other musicians as well. Though this is not a Czech-specific aspect of the music business or even small music scenes, it is worth noting because the musicians themselves are noting it.

On another occasion, while working on an album with a popular Czech female musician, the sound engineers and sound producers were inebriated while recording. This trend may deter some music groups from recording in the Czech Republic. Another such case is that of Zawadzki's experience filming a music video with a Czech band. The crew in charge drank a bottle of Fernet (a popular and strong Czech alcoholic beverage), refused to put make-up on the cast of musicians and did not want to spend more than 45 minutes filming. He notes that, even playing with Král, the organization of large live events left much to be desired. Whereas large events often have set protocol and a stage manager who tells the musicians a schedule as well informs them on preliminaries and technical info, he notes that playing large venues

in the Czech Republic was as simple as this: “You basically walk in off the street and on to the stage and hope the equipment is going to work.” Zawadzki notes that there were a lot of “stoned, drunk people standing around in charge of logistics.”

Ivan Král’s band was signed to the Universal label in the Czech Republic, which means that it is was responsible for promotion and distribution of recordings as well as organizing publicity and tours. Král’s 1999 album *Dancing Barefoot* was well liked by the Universal office in Australia, but little was done to promote it in the Czech Republic. Universal Australia offered the band the opportunity to tour Australia—an offer in which they were interested. But, because they had signed with Universal Czech Republic, they needed to have the permission of their home record label in order to enter into a contract to tour in a foreign country. Zawadzki notes that the home label did very little to make this happen, and in the end it did not.

Disorganization and indolence were cornerstones of this personal account of the 1990’s and early 2000’s professional music scene in the Czech Republic. Král would eventually return to the United States where he now pursues film scoring, independent writing and record producing.

Zawadzki comments, “It was almost more fun to be a bar musician because you could say well, whatever.”

## **Justin Lavash**

Justin Lavash was interviewed as a primary source. Lavash is multi-genre musician who moved to Prague in 2004, after playing music in London, France, the United States as well other countries around the world. Lavash currently plays about 85 shows around the Czech Republic per year. He was chosen for this paper because of his integration into the Czech music scene. After stealing a bike and cycling across Europe to get to Prague, Lavash spent his first year in Prague learning Czech and then began to pursue playing in Prague venues. Still, he feels he has only begun playing in the Czech music scene and hopes to become more integrated as the years progress. His multi-genre approach has opened some doors for him.

His experience playing in the Czech Republic has been different from that of playing in France. “France is a culture that throws itself at you,” says Lavash, “This country is very protective and secretive. If you don’t know it, it won’t be explained to you. You have to go after it.” He has endeavored to become integrated into the Czech live venue scene and has been rather successful. He has recorded and performed extensively with Monika Načeva, who receives her own section in this paper.

The French, in comparison with Czechs, are drawn to the tonal quality of jazz. The local jazz scene has had the reputation for being elitist—especially until recently. The Czechs are highly skilled jazz players, and becoming ever more so, but they are, in Lavash’s opinion, more drawn to its intricacies. “There must be a cultural resonance (for music)” he says.

He concludes that ska is currently popular in the Czech Republic because of its similarity in time signature to polka music, which originated in the Czech lands. Ska is an up-tempo genre that features frequent triplets, as can polka. The instrumentation in ska and polka can also be the same as they both may employ horns. Some ska also uses accordions, as in common in traditional polka. This is only a theory produced by Lavash, but it may well hold water. The social implications of ska may also be important in this regard. The image surrounding the genre is one of resistance, freedom, and general fun. Czech legends from the 1960's, 70's and 80's held this theme as well.

Lavash believes that Czechs are still searching for their own musical voice. Though there is a strong folk scene as well as a strong blue grass movement in the Czech Republic, he believes neither these nor the heralded music of the Plastic People of the Universe are the true Czech musical voice. In Lavash's opinion, the best is yet to come.

### **Will Tizard**

For an additional account of the Prague music scene from the 1990's until the present, I spoke with Will Tizard. Tizard is a former staff member of The Prague Post (music review section) as well as Time Out Prague Magazine and is the Czech and Slovak correspondent for movie industry guide Variety Magazine. As a culture editor, he has had journalism skills honed into Prague's daily life since 1994. He corroborates

much of what Zawadzki revealed in his interview. Tizard believes the live music scene in Prague has suffered over the last 15 years due to the emergence of DJ sets.

At the end of the 1990's, there were many more venues for live music. There was an early version of Meet Factory, now an arts center that receives city funding and hosts a number of theatre and music events. A real former meet factory in the Holešovice neighborhood was housed in an old slaughterhouse. Tizard describes it as having been 'anarchic.' Culture houses and places such as A Studio Rubin, where Načeva regularly performed in the 1990's, still offer music, but the atmosphere in these places is very different to the venues of the 1990's. More poignantly, the atmosphere is extremely different to the experiences at venues as described by Wanek and Jirous. Tizard says that Czechs, before 1989, used to get married for the sole reason of holding a legal concert as that was one of the avenues to take to easily get a live music event license. Today, this notion seems outrageous.

Tizard notes that clubs now hire DJ's instead of employing live acts. "Places like Roxy and Radost –you get a kid in with his mac. You can make a lot more money and less headache with DJ's. It's low overhead. It has killed live music in Prague in any place other than jazz and classical venues. " It's a global trend and Tizard believes it has lead to young people leaning away from starting their own bands. On the other hand, there has been a rise in hybrid bands which use live instrumentation mixed with recordings. Ohm Square is one example. This Prague-based international band have enjoyed relative success in the electronic pop scene in Prague. And many bands with a robust sound, such as Psí Vojáci, have been around for decades. They are not interested in expanding their following at the expensive of tailoring their

unique –and very Czech—sound. I must note that Psí Vojáci deserve their own entry in this paper as they rank with Už Jsme Doma and the Plastic People of the Universe as bands which changed the face of the Czech Republic during communism as well as continuing today, but I was unable to contact members from the group. But the consensus between Tizard and Zawadzki is a marked shift away from live music to DJ sets.

### **Social Implication of the Shift from small live venues to large DJ Sets**

Does this have a social implication? Does the shift from live music performed by real people to the preference for DJ's playing pre-recorded music affect society? I believe that it does. Creating music has been a way of drawing people together in all cultures since the beginning of time. Folk music is indicative of native cultures. While there is not a direct correlation between youth forming bands and folk music, there are some similarities. Folk music often tells stories and creates scenarios common to all people. Sentiments such as sense of loss, elation, romantic notions and can also act as a call to action. When DJ's replace live music, the intimacy of communicating common emotions or stories is lessened. The messages in songs performed by a band or played by a DJ may be the same, but it is the delivery which creates an impact and a sense of community. A live performer offers a living platform to carry out these messages and is susceptible to imperfection. This, in my opinion, adds value to live performances. In other words, foibles in the performance can also act to bring an audience together or create an atmosphere of intimacy. With pre-recorded DJ sets, this is not possible: the songs will be the same every time, barring the record does not skip.



Jazz, however, has remained a very static scene in Prague. Places like U Malého Gléna and Agharta, which runs its own label and year long jazz festival, attract local artists as well as respected international acts. “Prague is a place people want to come to. It’s cool to come to Prague as an artist. Still true in the jazz scene. Somewhat true of Palác Akropolis for the indie rock scene” says Tizard.

With regard to Czech musicians venturing in to politics, Tizard believes Czech bands veer away from the political sphere. They don’t want to take the music there as it’s not modern. “Musicians here really don’t do politics, which is kind of sad. I think they should. They might be able to make a difference,” he says.

This is especially interesting in conjunction with Jonsson’s assertion that the Slavonic aspect of current Czech popular and independent music has been overlooked. The question of the history of the Czech lands arises. Perhaps the history of changing borders and regimes has not only played a role in the development of Czech music genres and tastes as well as their perceived reluctance to avoid politics in song. The role the underground rock groups played in the 60’s through the late 1980’s is no longer necessary, and therefore there is no political void for the music to fill. But is this the only reason the music veers away from political meaning? Though this is true in many other countries, perhaps the historical context of music and its political and social implications in former Czechoslovakia play a crucial role in the state of the music today.

## **Ron Synovitz**

Ron Synovitz was interviewed as a primary source to document a foreigner's perspective on the situation of music in Prague from the early 1990's until today. He works as a journalist at Radio Free Europe and has covered a variety of political subjects both here and abroad as well as serving as a foreign news correspondent in places like Afghanistan and Pakistan. He has also recorded many Czech and foreign bands in Prague since the 1990's.

Synovitz arrived in Prague in 1992 following a stint working in Bulgaria. He decided to settle in Prague and is now a permanent resident. He is a valuable source of information on where people in Prague were going in the 1990's to listen to live music. He has been involved in recording countless bands over the last 18 years in Prague and has witnessed a marked shift in the kinds of music that are prevalent and the places people go to hear them. He has a foreigner's perspective on the historical aspects of the country with an integrated knowledge of what Czechs and foreigners were listening to and where they were going to listen to it.

One major difference, Synovitz remarks, is that busking was not illegal in the early 1990's. Musicians, talented and not-so-talented, from all around the world were able to set up on the Charles Bridge. This was one place for foreign musicians to meet. In addition, several establishments had bulletin boards where those new to Prague could find advertisements of lodging, potential jobs and interest groups—including music.

Arguably, venues set the parameters for music scenes in certain cities. The blues clubs of Chicago and Atlanta not only fulfill the demand for that genre of music within those cities, but also create spaces in which they are accessible and expected. They create the framework for live music to be performed. My questions to Mr. Synovitz focused on the kinds of venues people were frequenting in the 1990's and how that has changed from then up to today. Unsurprisingly, as there has been a great shift in the form and frequency of consumption of every imaginable thing in the Czech Republic since 1989, music is no exception. This is true especially in Prague. Though the traditional pub has, in many respects, been able to remain *the* traditional pub with less notable differences since the early days of capitalism, consumption of other goods—in this case, music—has seen a shift in trend. Start-ups of every variety were visible at the beginning of the 1990's. Synovitz speaks directly to the music venues which budded, blossomed and withered from the 1990's to the early 2000's on into the present.

*Jagsemash? A quirky look at the ways Czech venue culture has made its way to the mainstream.*

Legend has it that the character made popular by Sascha Baron Cohen takes his moniker from the three story pub located at Újezd at the bottom of Petřín Hill. Baron Cohen spent time in the late 1990's at the pub once called Klub Borat and now, in 2010, known as Klub Újezd. This has not been substantiated, but is, nevertheless an example of the countless legends surrounding ancient and current Prague life.

Though the club is still open, it no longer hosts live music. The offbeat and world famous group The Tiger Lillies appeared regularly on stage at Klub Borat in the 1990's, according to Synovitz. The group incorporates theatrical presentation into their musical production. The Scotsman's Claire Smith had this to say about The Tiger Lillies: Despite the gory imagery and the playground tricks, the Tiger Lillies' music is also gorgeously beautiful, tender and delicate – although the sweetness is almost always followed by some outrageously funny or horrible twist” (Smith). Arguably, this description would be accurate for the interior of the present day Klub Újezd as well. Though there is no tangible evidence and it cannot be proven in tangible terms, there is something to be said for environment shaping art.

The Tiger Lillies are an example of a band of foreigners who operated in Prague and were able to make a successful living from their music. They no longer live here as they spend most of their time touring the world or living in the original homelands, but they are considered by many to be a Prague band—especially by those who saw them in their formative days at Klub Borat.

Zawadzki, Lavash and Synovitz are pieces of the live performance experience in Prague from the mid-1990's until now. Though they have influenced and experienced the sphere in varying ways, I believe chronicling what they have to say is invaluable in that it paints a picture of a time and a place that, though subjective, has had very real implications of the interpretation many have come away from the city over the last fifteen years. They paint a picture of general ebbing of one kind of music, specifically independent “do-it-yourself” brand music to more mass-produced dance

music. Perhaps this is a takeover by mainstream. Though Jonsson points to a flourish of small bands playing a variety of genres over the last twenty years, a look at the mainstream hits can help reveal what people are listening to on the radio.

**Recent Mainstream Music in the Czech Republic differs greatly from the underground and rock music of the past as well as the live acts of the past and present in the city of Prague.**

Prague's Radio 1, formerly Radio Stalin, offers listeners the opportunity to vote for their favorite songs. Below is a list of the top ten songs in the Czech Republic from 1992 (first available data) to 2000. Analysis follows.

### **1992 Top Ten Songs in the Czech Republic**

1	Friday I'm In Love	<b>CURE</b>
2	Midlife Crisis	<b>FAITH NO MORE</b>
3	Under The Bridge	<b>RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS</b>
4	High	<b>CURE</b>
5	Face To Face	<b>SIOUXSIE &amp; THE BANSHEES</b>
6	Cry	<b>SIOUXSIE &amp; THE BANSHEES</b>
7	Temple Of Love (1992)	<b>SISTERS OF MERCY FEATURING OFRA HAZA</b>
8	A Letter To Elise	<b>CURE</b>
9	One	<b>U2</b>
10	A Small Victory	<b>FAITH NO MORE</b>

### **1993 Top Ten Songs in the Czech Republic**

1	Free Your Mind	<b>HEADCRAH</b>
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2	Today	<b>SMASHING PUMPKINS</b>
3	Animal Nitrate	<b>SUEDE</b>
4	You Suck	<b>CONSOLIDATED</b>
5	The Life Of The Zombie	<b>WALTARI</b>
6	Angry Chair	<b>ALICE IN CHAINS</b>
7	Da Ya Think I'm Sexy?	<b>REVOLTING COCKS</b>
8	Go	<b>PEARL JAM</b>
9	Living In The Rose	<b>NEW MODEL ARMY</b>
10	Vienna	<b>ULTRAVOX</b>

### **1994 Top Ten Songs in the Czech Republic**

1	Headache	<b>FRANK BLACK</b>
2	Disarm	<b>SMASHING PUMPKINS</b>
3	Millennium	<b>KILLING JOKE</b>
4	Burn	<b>CURE</b>
5	Mmm Mmm Mmm Mmm	<b>CRASH TEST DUMMIES</b>
6	We Are The Pigs	<b>SUEDE</b>

7	No Rain	<b>BLIND MELON</b>
8	March Of The Pigs	<b>NINE INCH NAILS</b>
9	Do You Remember The First Time?	<b>PULP</b>
10	Sabotage	<b>BEASTIE BOYS</b>

### **1995 Top Ten Songs in the Czech Republic**

1	Wake Up Boo	<b>BOO RADLEYS</b>
2	Bullet With Butterfly Wings	<b>SMASHING PUMPKINS</b>
3	Dredd Song	<b>CURE</b>
4	Army Of Me	<b>BJÖRK</b>
5	The Crablouse	<b>LORDS OF ACID</b>
6	Hearts Filthy Lesson	<b>DAVID BOWIE</b>
7	Man Who Sold The World	<b>NIRVANA</b>
8	Self Esteem	<b>OFFSPRING</b>
		<b>NICK CAVE &amp; KYLIE</b>
9	Where The Wild Roses Grow	<b>MINOGUE</b>
10	Wake Up Boo	<b>BOO RADLEYS</b>



### **1996 Top Ten Songs in the Czech Republic**

1	Great Blondino	<b>STAKKA BO</b>
2	Tonight Tonight	<b>SMASHING PUMPKINS</b>
3	Big Me	<b>FOO FIGHTERS</b>
4	E-Bow The Letter	<b>R.E.M.</b>
		<b>EVERYTHING BUT THE</b>
5	Walking Wounded	<b>GIRL</b>
6	Spaceman	<b>BABYLON ZOO</b>
7	Jesus Christ Superstar	<b>LAIBACH</b>
8	Lay Lady Lay	<b>MINISTRY</b>
9	Mint Car	<b>CURE</b>
10	Setting Sun	<b>CHEMICAL BROTHERS</b>

### **1997 Top Ten Songs in the Czech Republic**

1	Ain't Talkin' 'bout Dub	<b>APOLLO FOUR FORTY</b>
2	Smack My Bitch Up	<b>PRODIGY</b>
3	Thirty-three	<b>SMASHING PUMPKINS</b>
4	Barrel Of A Gun	<b>DEPECHE MODE</b>
5	Engel	<b>RAMMSTEIN</b>
		<b>POP FROM THE DEEP</b>
6	Let's Talk About It	<b>END</b>
7	Risingson	<b>MASSIVE ATTACK</b>
8	You're Not Alone	<b>OLIVE</b>
9	Ready To Go	<b>REPUBLICA</b>
10	Block Rockin' Beats	<b>CHEMICAL BROTHERS</b>

### **1998 Top Ten Songs in the Czech Republic**

1	Tear Drop	<b>MASSIVE ATTACK</b>
2	More Than This	<b>THE CURE</b>

3	Hunter	<b>BJORK</b>
4	Angel	<b>MASSIVE ATTACK</b>
5	Intergalactic	<b>BEASTIE BOYS</b>
	If You Tolerate This	<b>MANIC STREET</b>
6		<b>PREACHERS</b>
7	All I Need	<b>AIR</b>
8	Part Of The Process	<b>MORCHEEBA</b>
	Perfect	<b>THE SMASHING</b>
9		<b>PUMPKINS</b>
10	The Sweetest Thing	<b>U2</b>

### **1999 Top Ten Songs in the Czech Republic**

1	Style	<b>ORBITAL</b>
2	All Is Full Of Love	<b>BJORK</b>
3	Nothing Left	<b>ORBITAL</b>
4	Right Here Right Now	<b>MASSIVE ATTACK</b>

5	Push Upstairs	<b>UNDERWORLD</b>
6	Hey Boy Hey Girl ...	<b>CHEMICAL BROTHERS</b>
7	We're In This Together	<b>NINE INCH NAILS</b>
8	Only You	<b>PORTISHEAD</b>
9	Scartissue	<b>RHCHP</b>
10	Run On	<b>MOBY</b>

### **2010 Top Ten Songs in the Czech Republic**

1	The Time is Now	<b>MOLOKO</b>
2	Carmen Queasy	<b>MAXIM/SKIN</b>
3	Cowgirl	<b>UNDERWORLD</b>
4	Stand Inside Your Love	<b>SMASHING PUMPKINS</b>
5	Natural Blues	<b>MOBY</b>
6	Nothing As It Seems	<b>PEARL JAM</b>
7	Beautiful Day	<b>U2</b>
8	Beached	<b>ORBITAL</b>
	Rome Wasn't Built in a Day	<b>MORCHEEBA</b>
	Rome Wasn't Built in a Day	<b>MORCHEEBA</b>

**Analysis of the Recent Mainstream Trend**

Though these charts exclude genres such as jazz and blues, they may be used as an indicator of the kind of music that was popular in the Czech Republic during the 1990's. It must be taken into account that a generalization cannot be made solely based on Rádio 1's Hitparáda because the type of music radio stations play do not encompass all of the genres which are actively being listened to by a nation. It can conclusively be said that the majority of the songs in the top ten during the years 1992 to 2000 on Radio 1 were decidedly from the West. Of the 40 songs listed above, only one is by a band from the former Soviet Bloc. Laibach, a Slovenian band with a German name for their capital city Ljubljana, came in 7<sup>th</sup> in 1996 with a cover of Jesus Christ Superstar. The band plays industrial music and, according to muzikus.cz, an online music magazine, the band played an important political role as well as tackled ideological problems. Much like their Czech counterparts of the underground culture of resistance and government criticism, Laibach garnered a cult following. Their songs are performed in German or English. Formed in 1980 in what was former Yugoslavia, Laibach still perform today.

It is telling that the songs preferred by Rádio 1 listeners in the 1990's were from the West with the exception of Slovenian political resistance band, Laibach. These

charts are consistent with many European countries in the 1990's. Though The Plastic People of the Universe, Monika Načeva and hold places in the collective Czech memory either as holders of underground values or multi-genre idols, it is interesting to note that they do not appear on the Radio 1 charts. Even more interesting is the fact that no Czech artist appears on any of the Radio 1 charts examined. There could be a variety of reasons for this fact.

German charts from the same time period are a robust mixture of English language dance music as well as songs with German lyrics by German bands. This is also true of neighboring Austria, Switzerland, Spain and France. Though these other countries have a history of interest in English language music of all genres from the United States as well as the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic of the 1990's and today illustrate less native language chart topping hits in the mainstream, radio-friendly genre.

The latest charts available from Radio 1 are from 2008, as listed below.

- |   |                              |                      |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | The Rip                      | <b>PORTISHEAD</b>    |
| 2 | Inni Mer Syngur Vitleysingur | <b>SIGUR ROS</b>     |
| 3 | Dear Miami                   | <b>ROISIN MURPHY</b> |
| 4 | All I need                   | <b>RADIOHEAD</b>     |

5	Jigsaw Falling Into Place	<b>RADIOHEAD</b>
6	Weird Fishes	<b>RADIOHEAD</b>
7	Sit and Wonder	<b>THE VERVE</b>
8	Beautiful Burnout	<b>UNDERWORLD</b>
9	Sleep When I'm Dead	<b>THE CURE</b>
10	Gobbledigook	<b>SIGUR ROS</b>

All chart data sourced from Radio 1: <http://www.radio1.cz/Hitparáda/> Data available from 1992- 2008.

This shows a clear shift from the trend toward dance pop in the 1990's to a different kind of British genre. Aside from Icelandic Sigur Ros, every song on the top ten is authored by a group from Great Britain. In comparison, ten years earlier the top ten was shared by British, Icelandic American and French artists. The tempos of the songs listed above in the 2008 chart vary heavily from those a decade earlier. They are more low-key. This may be a European trend on all fronts and deserves its own research, but is so marked it cannot be overlooked in this paper.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has been intended to be a survey of aspects of social and political trends through the eyes of a foreigner interested in the journey from popular music of the 1960's the current status of the music scene in the Czech Republic. The collected interviews work together to form a collective picture of the changes in the Czech, especially Prague live, music environment over the last 40 years. Although some of the people I spoke with had differing views about the influences on the underground, it can be concluded that it is currently believed to have had a great influence on the events leading up to the Velvet Revolution. It also plays a role, at least in the minds of many journalists (both Czech and foreign) in the mindset of the Czechoslovak people and state during the 1960's through the late 80's. As discussed in the paper, there is also some discrepancy as to whether the influences and inspirations were Beat, Slavonic or even political.

I believe the interviews I conducted to be very valuable as I strove to ask specific questions outside the regular sphere of the many interviews that have been conducted with the majority of the subjects. I concede that it would have been useful to speak with many more people, but I spoke with as many as were agreeable to hold an interview with me. I am grateful for the informative conversations with Václav Křístek, Radek Diestler, Ron Synovitz, Justin Lavash, Monika Načeva, Mirek Wanek, Vratislav Brabenec, as well as music ethnographer Darrell Jonsson. I spoke with



several others, but the data I collected was not congruent with the above, especially as I moved away from the sphere of jazz and focused the paper on the political and social aspects of music from roughly the 1970's until the present.

Music has played an important role in the political and social developments in the Czech Lands over the past 40 years. From the budding underground movement of the 60's and 70's into the alternativa movement, the impact of music and the culture surrounding music cannot be ignored. It is said to have even brought about a revolution. Through the 1980's, it drew criticism from the state for facets such as language. The 1990's offered a time of mellowing, though not in musical style, for the live music scene, especially in Prague. Commercialization took over the charts as more international and DJ acts gained exposure in the city. Perhaps now, Czech music is neither surrounded by controversy and is therefore apolitical. But the role and power of musical movements have been proven by the lessons of the past.

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**DECLARATION:**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, based on the sources and literature listed in the appended bibliography. The thesis as submitted is 137191 keystrokes long (including spaces), i.e. 92 manuscript pages.

Flanna Sheridan

Signature

July 21<sup>st</sup> 2011

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1